STYLE

THE SUNDAY TIMES

2 AUGUST 2026

ICE SCULPTURES!

JELLY SHOES!

YACHT FEVER!

SMUG BEACH READS!

HEATWAVE HAIR SCARVES!

HOW SUMMER 2026 ARE YOU?

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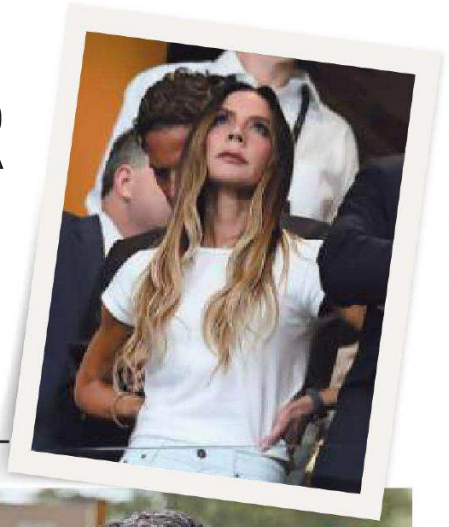
THE BAROMETER

Fashion! Beauty! People! Things! Welcome to your weekly guide to the stuff everyone will be talking about. Do keep up

EDITED BY **ANNA SILVERMAN**



From top Victoria Beckham; street style in Paris; Sabrina Elba; Anya Taylor-Joy

Getty Images

The 'don't overthink it' T-shirt

For all the uproar over the casualisation of our clothes, you've got to admit there's a specific joy to be found in throwing on a plain white tee. No floordrobe pile of discarded outfit attempts; instead, just an easy, breezy look that suggests you know your own mind. And this summer we've seen the wardrobe staple promoted from casual Sundays to main event. Take Victoria Beckham, who wore hers to watch England's defeat to Argentina (sob), most likely her own brand's Jamie T-shirt (£150). She joined the likes of Anya Taylor-Joy, Sabrina Elba and Shaniqua Okwok, who rewrote the red carpet rule book by wearing hers to the *Heartstopper Forever* premiere in London. So where to buy the classic? Cos, Uniqlo, M&S and Albaray are our go-tos. Sunspel is the midmarket classic, alongside Toteme and With Nothing Underneath. And if you're in New York, look for Los Angeles Apparel. Wear with jeans and a loud accessory for a look that winks "I've got my act together" — well, until you spill red wine down your front.

STYLE

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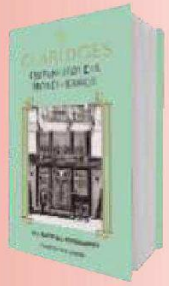
Going up

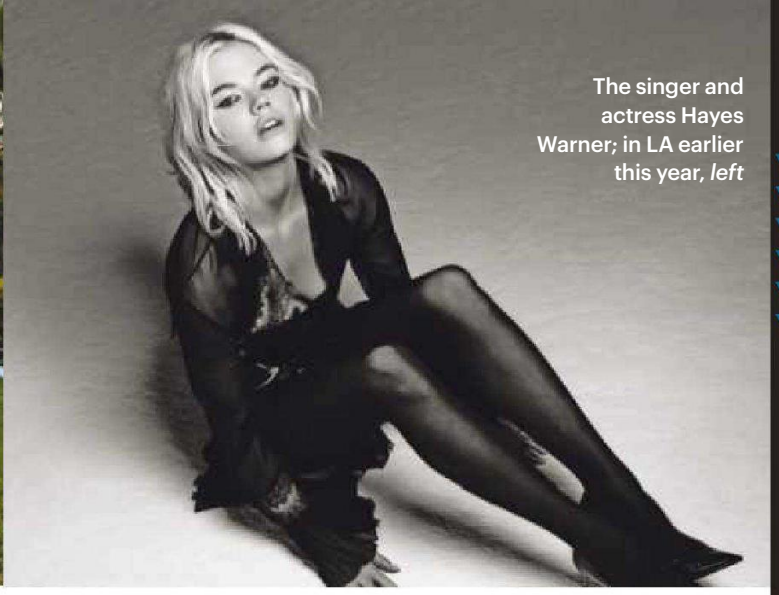
▲ **'INTUITIVE WELLNESS'**
The new health movement rejecting data trackers. Funnily enough, we don't need a watch to tell us we're knackered

▲ **THE MULTITASKING TOTE**
Cult Gaia's bag doubles as a backgammon set



▲ **HOTEL GOSSIP**
Claridge's has just unveiled its first book. Insight into how high society holidays? Go on

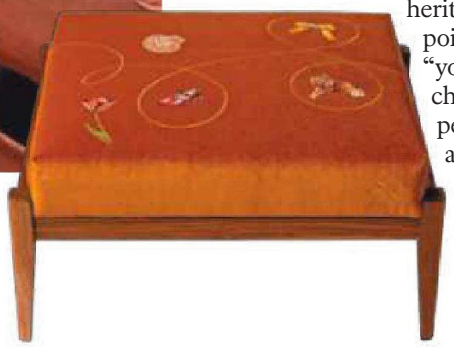
▲ **RAW MENUS**
Rita's in Soho is switching off its ovens for August. If you can't take the heat...



The singer and actress Hayes Warner; in LA earlier this year, *left*

Everyone's talking about... Hayes Warner

When Ryan Murphy wants you involved in his next TV project, there's only one answer. True to form, Murphy's upcoming psychological drama series, *The Shards* (out August 6 on Disney+), co-created with Bret Easton Ellis — the author of the original book — is set to be another hit. And Hayes Warner, 27, has landed one of the star roles as Debbie Schaffer, part of a group of privileged seniors at an elite prep school, alongside a cast that includes Kaia Gerber, Homer Gere, and Wes Bentley and Evan Rachel Wood as Warner's on-screen parents. "We got to showcase our group dynamic in real life and bring it into our characters," she says of hanging out with the young members of the cast out of hours. "And I hope that that's clear in the series, how much we actually love each other." *The Shards* is Warner's first acting job; before this she was making music and has two original songs in the series. Next she's back to her music, which is inspired by the likes of Depeche Mode, Blondie and some of the other music in the series (think early Eighties dark synth). "I love acting just as much as I love music, so my goal in life is to do both." Watch out, she's the ultimate double threat.



Above One of Francesca Anfossi's ceramic-inlay tables. **Right** A stool by Uncommon Ancestor

Interiors, but make them sentimental

Does your table talk? Do you have a chairloom? Does your quilt have a loved one's words woven in? Then you're bang on the money when it comes to the latest interiors trend: furniture decorated with meaningful doodles that tell a personal story. Kara Douwma of Uncommon Ancestor reimagines the footstool as a "canvas for storytelling", the textile artist and designer Bellamy Jean embroiders personalised café curtains, while Hugs makes blankets for children decorated with wishes or drawings from loved ones. "I'm interested in making functional objects that carry memory, identity and connection," says the artist Francesca Anfossi, whose tables are inlaid with ceramic motifs inspired by a family's heritage. Douwma points out that "you can deliberately choose which people, memories and moments live with you." The ultimate objects of affection, then?

Going down

▼THE SUMMER SLUMP
Fed up with shlepping into the office while everyone's on holiday? Remember, the alternative is winter

▼NO READ RECEIPTS
Do you not realise our sanity depends on seeing that blue tick?

▼MASSAGES
The new way to de-stress? A dedicated "hair play" healing session. (Yes, it's a thing)

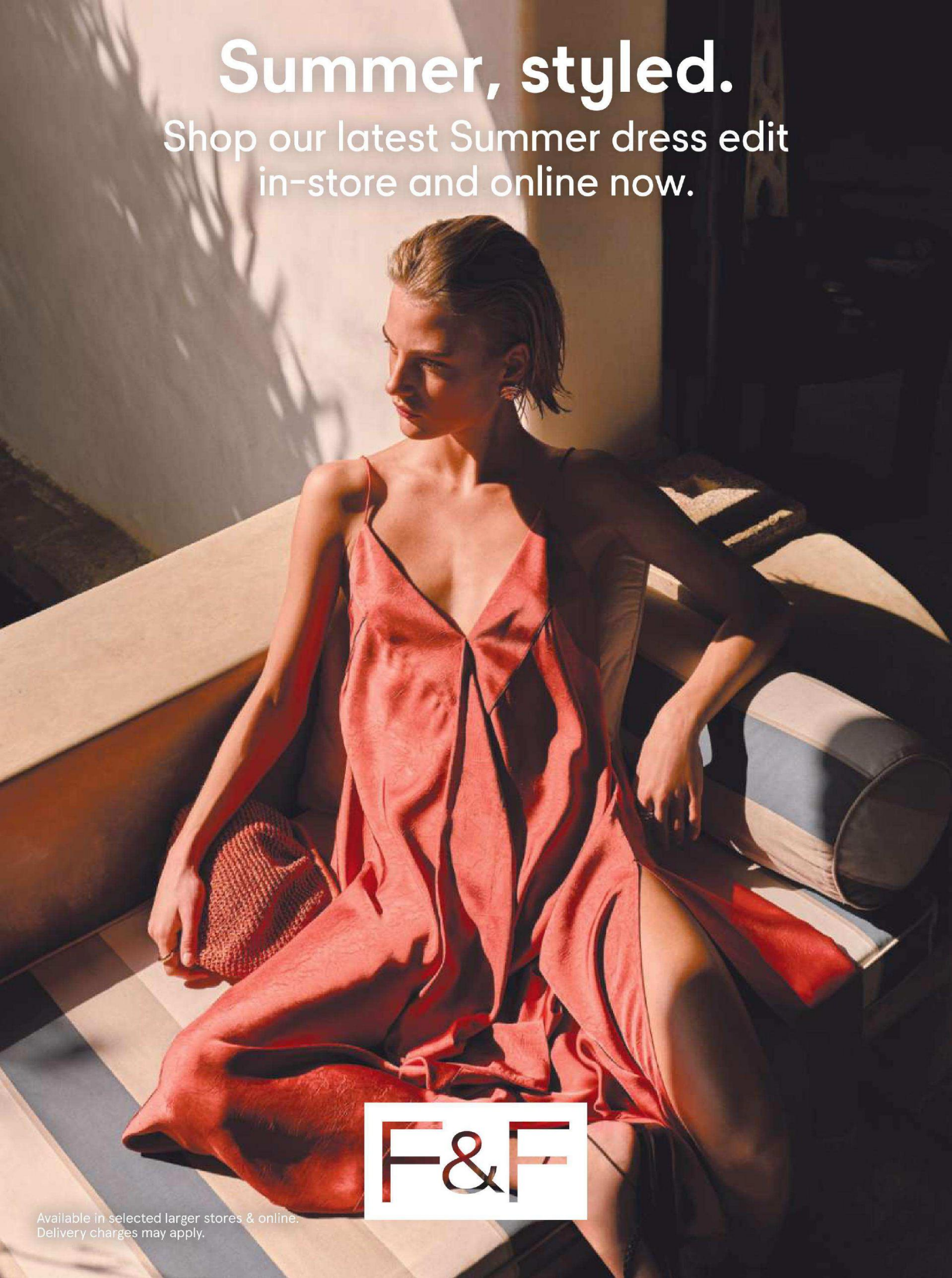
▼COLLAGEN DRINKS
Delicious... but do they work?

PHOTOGRAPH **SAM NICKLIN**
EDIT **FLOSSIE SAUNDERS**

ONE MORE THING

Piaget understands the power of colour: its signature statement jewellery combines bright gemstone colour pops with carved hard stones. Now, a collection of fine jewellery cocktail rings mixes the prettiest of colours in both — citrine with carnelian, aquamarine with amethyst. Stack across your fingers for a delicious candy-toned assortment. **Piaget Cocktail rings, from £16,100 each, piaget.com**

Additional words: Jessica Diamond. Photographs: GettyImages


Summer, styled.
Shop our latest Summer dress edit
in-store and online now.
F&F
Available in selected larger stores & online.
Delivery charges may apply.

HOW SUMMER 2026 ARE YOU?

WORDS **JOE BROMLEY**

Jacket, £3,500, skirt, £1,670, shoes, £785, Capucines Mini bag, £5,500, suitcase, £2,810, and Keepall Bandoulière holdall, £3,150, Louis Vuitton

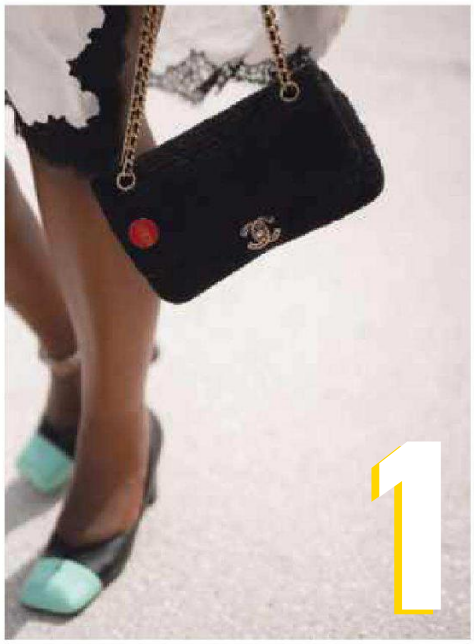
LOUIS VUITTON

Crochet dresses, tinned cocktails and, um, egg-and-spoon races: have you been doing this season in style? Read on now

The seven fashion trends it's hard to avoid

Chanel power players

First came the fashion editors, then the influencers and now everyone else. Matthieu Blazy's new Chanel bags and shoes, flashed with turquoise leather or furry leopard print, are this summer's highest-status accessories.



Granny knows best

Noticed that people seem to have raided a retiree's dusty wardrobe? Picture granny crochet crafted into cardigans or halterneck dresses. Brightly coloured golfing shirts, once banished to the country club, have also been resurrected. The coolest polo wearers layer two in contrasting shades, collars popped.

Hiker shorts

Update the gorpcore look for summer? One need only look to the Princess of Wales taking on the Three Peaks Challenge in June, in burnt-orange North Face shorts worn high on the waist with matching walking socks (*far right*), to be convinced. They've caught on in town too — not least with Harry Styles jogging from Hampstead in a lilac pair to perform at Wembley Stadium.

Lazy lingerie

Miss Havisham, but make it sexy. Lace-trimmed slips, silk rompers and spaghetti-strap tops have become a heatwave uniform, offered everywhere from Ferragamo to M&S and Zara. Best styled with fresh-out-of-bed hair.

FREE PEOPLE

Bardot chic

From the Ibiza Gen Z set (Lila Moss, Stella Jones et al) to Priyanka Chopra at Wimbledon (*below left*), the folded square headscarf is this season's It accessory. Knot it behind the head à la Brigitte Bardot, rather than under the chin Queen Elizabeth II-style.

5

Fashion football shirts

Football shirts with everything: worn with skirts and heels, baggy denim or bikinis — as demonstrated by Dua Lipa in a Napoli jersey on the Amalfi coast. Or totally fashionified with a reconstituted shirred footie top by Conner Ives.

6

JIMMY CHOO

7

CHLOÉ

Jelly lovers

After fisherman sandals and caged ballet flats, the jelly kitten heel has dominated feet this summer. Jimmy Choo, Chloé and Melissa have versions ready for beach-to-posh-beach-restaurant dressing. But a warning: we're told they're not the comfiest choice.

Getty Images

The do's and don'ts for this summer's soirees

Do...

ERECT A POP-UP PUB

This was by far the greatest "if money is no object" flex of the summer. Hermès created the Horse & Carrot in the grounds of the Hurlingham Club, where Jools Holland and Fatboy Slim performed. Meanwhile, the jeweller Jessica McCormack set up McCormack's Tavern in Mount Street Gardens — Zoë Kravitz was spotted nursing a pint (*below*).

ORGANISE FUN

Don't roll your eyes. Sports days were an unlikely highlight of the summer party circuit, the best hosted by Burberry in Kensington Gardens, where a tug-of-war and egg-and-spoon race, won by Team Joy Crookes, made for memorable tales.

HAVE A SUMMER ICE SCULPTURE

Totally eccentric given this year's weather conditions, and yet really rather fabulous. An icy Vivienne Westwood orb (*bottom*), which held court at J Sheekey's terrace opening party, was chic, even if it dripped all over Kelly Osbourne.

EMPLOY A 'CULINARY ARTIST'

Got a caterer? Awkward. The only talked-about snacks this year came from those going the extra mile. The food artist Laila Gohar (*above top*) took centre stage at the Serpentine's VIP-laden summer party. Think sprawling platters of thick chocolate treats, a wall of cocoa bricks and Mexican-style elote corn on the cob, which stood forest-like in the gardens.

EMBRACE A LITERARY INTERLUDE

Call it pretentious, but it is all about the lit crowd this year. From a spoken-word night in a Kilburn boxing ring, hosted by the literary platform Dream Baby Press, to the flurry of poetry evenings populating the social schedule, an elite night is not made without some verse or prose.

HIRE MODEL WAITERS

If guests aren't fawning over the men and women dishing out champagne, you have probably not yet reached the upper echelons of the event scene. "Luxury event staffing" companies such as Kalon 11 (*above*) rule the roost.

Don't...

HAVE BARTENDERS MAKING COCKTAILS

No one wants to wait through a mixologist show. Hefty ice buckets filled with smart tinned cocktails are the way to go. The best this year come from Ghost Labs, Badwater and M&S, whose offering has exploded — try the highly quaffable lychee Saké Spritz.

SERVE OYSTERS

It's simply not worth it. Platters resting in the corner of the Royal Academy's Summer Party looked intimidating. If you are catering for more than 30, the odds of someone getting ill are not worth contemplating.

MAKE PEOPLE SHOUT ALL NIGHT

Whether you have invested in the DJ or not, don't whack up the volume until people can't remember where they are or why they accepted the invitation.

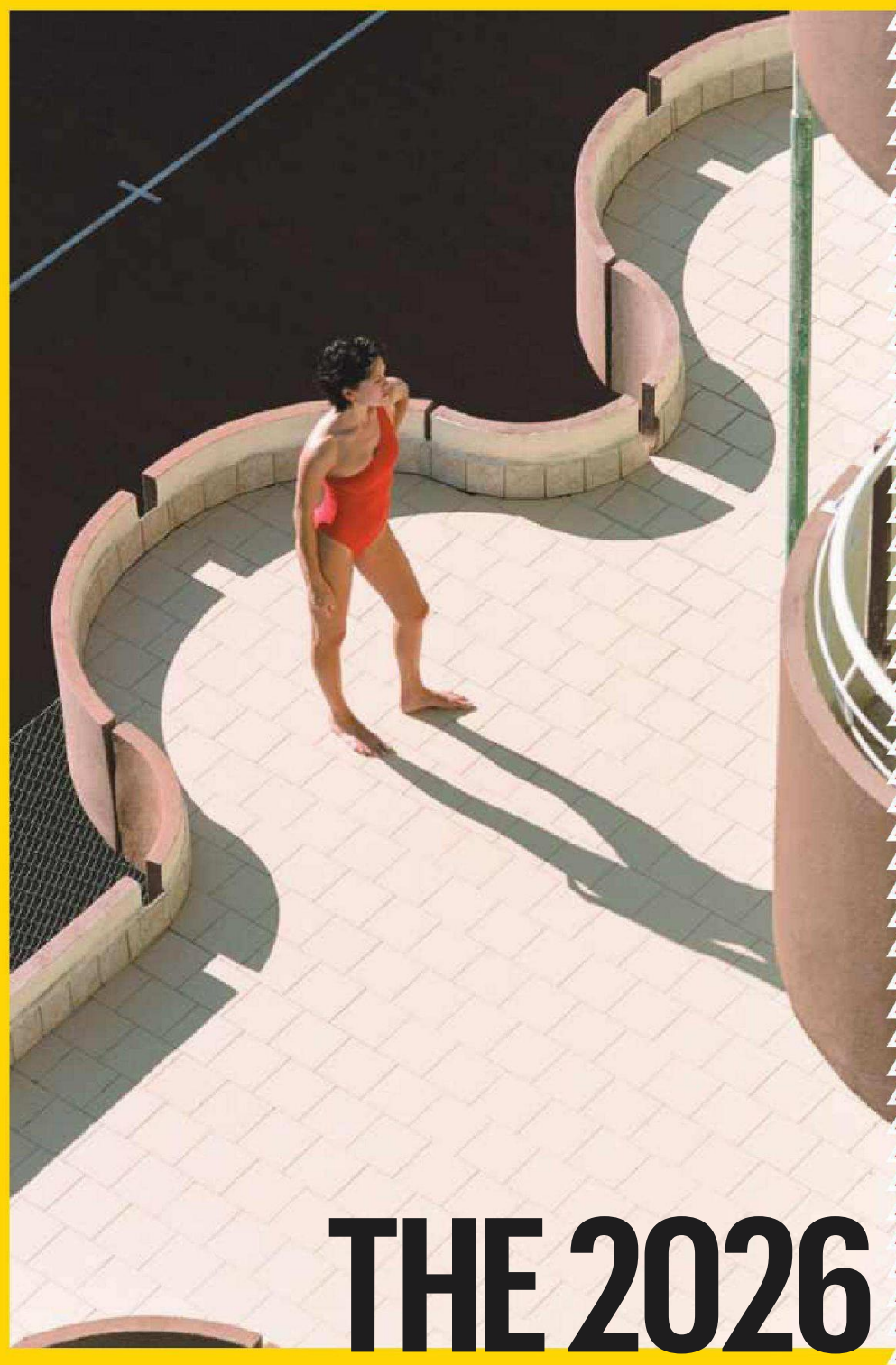
NEGLECT THE NONDRINKERS

A real faux pas, likely to provoke barbed comments. Elton John's Zero Blanc de Blancs has been the toast of plenty of parties, while the most talked-about soft drink is Yew Pickle, the UK's first pickle-flavoured sparkling spring water. For the brave.

OVERPIMP YOUR TABLE

Light, tasteful tablescaping is nice. A crammed set-up, with countless candlesticks and florals arranged like invasive species, leaving no room for wine glasses, is nothing but a hazard.

Getty Images, @alexachung, Max Cisotti, Thomas Alexander Photography, @jesswitheyphoto, @emypstudios. Ventinove swimsuit, £170, lido-lido.com



THE 2026 SOCIAL MEDIA SMUG-O-METER

THE TRAVEL-GRAMMERS
Getting there does not need to be broadcast. Airport lounge snaps, private jet pictures, matching Rimowas and aesthetic security tray shots all offer far too much insight into the grisly details.

THE RAWGS
That's the Royal Ascot, Wimbledon, Goodwood and Silverstone attendees. Well done for completing society's sporting event bingo, but the endless posts from each do clog up our feeds.

FAIR-WEATHER WILD SWIMMERS
The moment the temperature rises above 23C, there is a mass migration to the nearest body of water, often to the detriment of a few swans' eggs. Expect posh picnic snaps, without much evidence of anyone actually entering the pond.

CONCERT DOCUMENTARIANS
Endless clips, filmed from the gods, or the Golden Circle, of Bad Bunny, Lily Allen, Harry Styles or anyone at BST Hyde Park are not necessarily doing what you think they are. Hearing the culprit butcher the hit's lyrics is bad; ten second-plus videos of your friends dancing to it are worse.

RING BELL FASHIONISTAS
The Ring bell selfie, popularised by Alexa Chung, has made everyone a CCTV expert. We've spotted plenty of imitators tilting their heads just so, trying to ensure the Miu Miu logo on their sunglasses is picked up by the grainy camera.

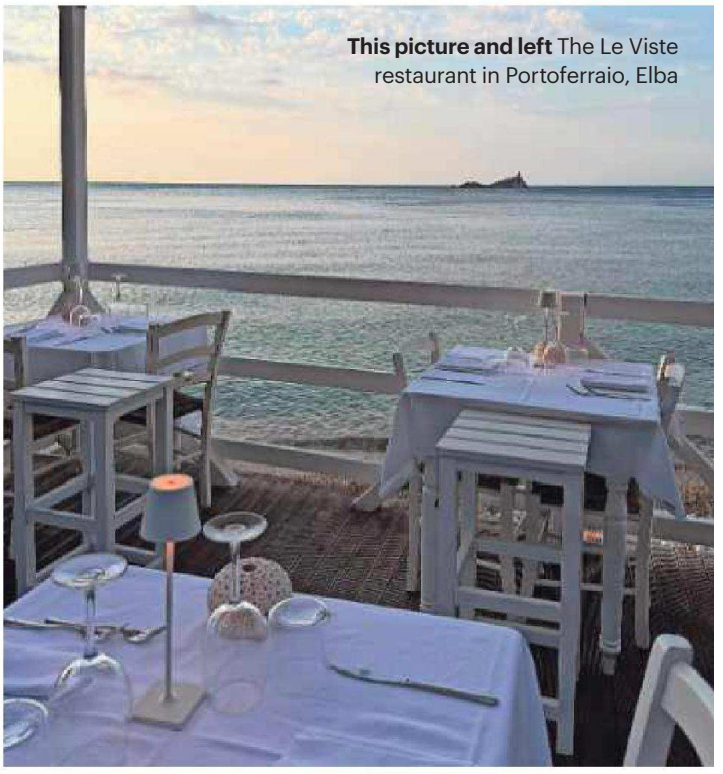
SEE YOU ON THE SWEDISH RIVIERA

Move over, Marseille: here's where the style set are sunning themselves right now

Scandi chic

As southern Europe morphs into somewhere Hades might enjoy visiting with his mates, this season's hottest destinations are actually cooler. The Swedish riviera has long attracted the cinematic set — largely thanks to the film-maker Ingmar Bergman, who lived on the island of Faro — and has lured visitors from Noah Baumbach to Willem Dafoe. Now, neighbouring Gotland, with its raw countryside, is enjoying broader appeal. Sibbjans, a group of elegant 18th-century limestone farm buildings transformed into a contemporary Swedish hotel, opened in April for its second summer season. The king of Sweden has already been spotted dining there with friends, promptly helping it to get booked up. Those wanting to reconnect with nature will be more attracted to its 200-acre regenerative farm and traditional Gotlandic threshing barn used for yoga than they will to a farmhouse in rural Ibiza. You're more likely to encounter a horned Gotland sheep than a spangly neon bikini, for a start.

Top The restored main farmhouse at Sibbjans has nine guest rooms. **Above** The natural swimming pool is filled with rainwater and purified by plants and filters. **Right** A fishing village on Gotland



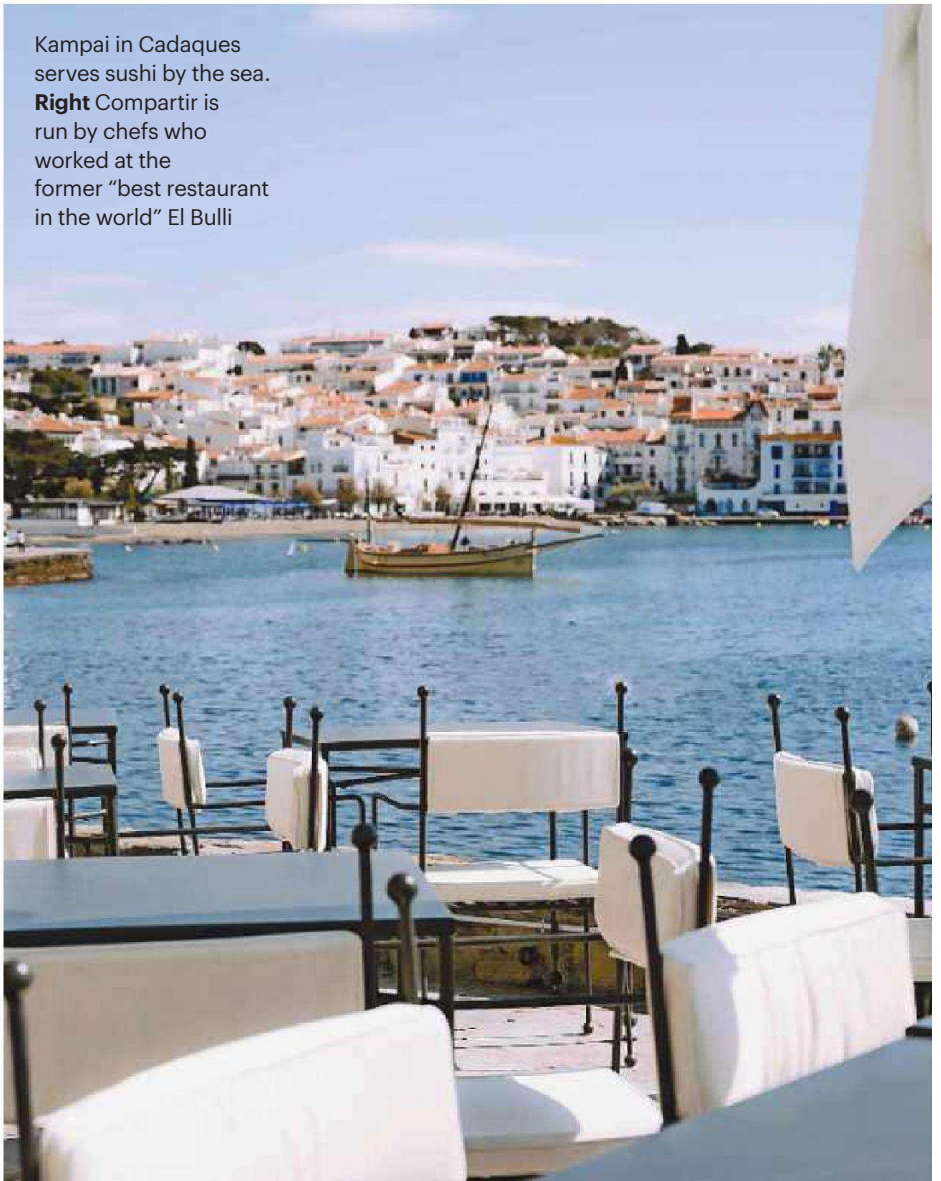
This picture and left The Le Viste restaurant in Portoferraio, Elba

The new island-hopping

While Italy's cities broil and heave (and the Amalfi coast becomes almost as packed) head directly to the islands for slower, breezier escapes. Many IYKYK spots dot the coastline, although those who find them are tight-lipped and never geotag, for fear of ruining the magic. This year, however, insiders are following in Napoleon's footsteps, exiling themselves to Elba, off the Tuscan coast, among holidaying Italians and a few newer arrivals. Mark Zuckerberg's 119m yacht, Launchpad, has already been spotted offshore. The Le Viste restaurant, isolated in a tiny cove, is the island's most romantic spot, specialising in traditional pasta and just-caught fish and seafood. Then while away the days on the small beaches along the Capoliveri coastline. Just watch out for tech bros.

Viva Cadaques

Those happy to brave the heat have Cadaques on their checklist, the charming foodie Catalan fishing village on the Costa Brava, better known for its association with Salvador Dalí, who lived nearby, than as the off-the-beaten-track escape for A-listers it is today. Mick Jagger and Shakira have visited, while the actress Ellie Bamber calls it her favourite place in the world. "Not only is it stunningly beautiful, full of art and creativity, but also the culinary scene there is insane," she says. Don't miss Compartir, run by the former head chefs of El Bulli; Talla, where the food is as good as the view; and Kampai for sushi. Stay at the Can Set hotel, find the hot set drinking at the new Oli Bar, and improve your wardrobe at Mo.



Kampai in Cadaques serves sushi by the sea. **Right** Compartir is run by chefs who worked at the former "best restaurant in the world" El Bulli

Getty Images; courtesy of Le Viste, Sibbjans, Compartir, Kampai

SAY WHAT?

Overheard everywhere

‘Is it me, or are M&S clothes really good this summer?’

It’s not just you who has cottoned on to this

‘I’ll need to have lymphatic drainage beforehand’

Somehow the slimming massage of the moment has overtaken the blow-dry as the pre-event must-have

‘We’re just not built for this’ / ‘This is the new normal’

The heatwave chat has been dire

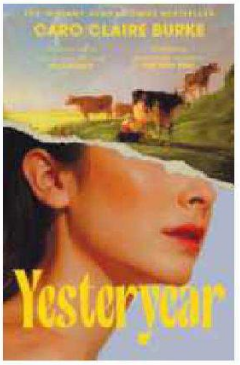
‘It didn’t really feel like summer without Glastonbury’

Fallow-year wallowers, there are too many of you

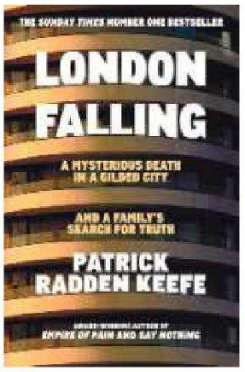
‘Have you seen the new Wegovy pill?’

Yes, and read all about the stampede to get on the list

What your 2026 beach read says about you

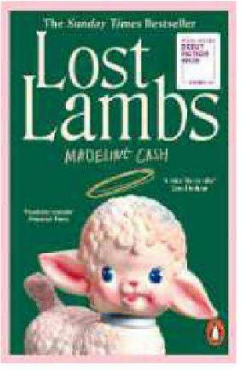


YESTERYEAR
by Caro Claire Burke
You have a Substack... or have been talking about starting one since February. Your Notes app is full of observations on modern life, and reading sessions are best accompanied by a glass of rosé.

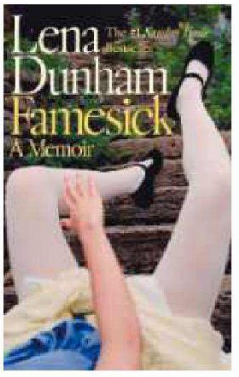


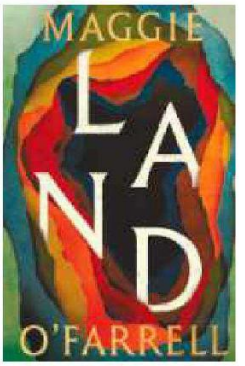
LONDON FALLING
by Patrick Radden Keefe
You like your books how you like your podcasts: true crime and extremely buzzy. Not many people survived June without reading it, but those still “saving it for the flight” might find themselves tempted to switch to the audiobook.

LOST LAMBS
by Madeline Cash
You’re 24, live with three flatmates and work in advertising, PR or publishing. Dinner is salmon, broccoli and potatoes cooked together in the air fryer, and you might even be guilty of sending pictures of passages from the book to the group chat.

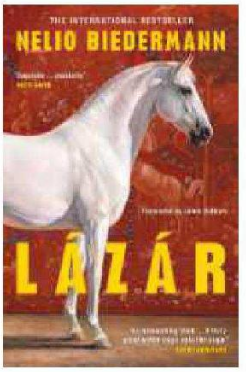


FAMESICK
by Lena Dunham
The cover will make it on to your Instagram twice before you reach chapter three, and the caption will be a variant of “God, I love Lena” followed by a memory of watching *Girls*. Alternatively you’re a celebrity hoping she’ll invite you to dinner.





LAND
by Maggie O’Farrell
You watched *Hamnet* once, cried, and have been chasing the emotional high ever since. Now a self-declared Maggie O’Farrell devotee, you may casually mention “beautiful prose”, despite having to reread the same chapter three times on your lounger because you keep drifting off.



LÁZÁR
by Nelio Biedermann
You appreciate an elegant dust jacket almost as much as the writing inside, and would not be caught with a neon cover. You now exclaim that “Nelio was only 22 when he published it” with a parent’s pride.

Celeste Sloman/Trunk Archive, @kyliejenner

CABIN FEVER

Seasickness! Socialites! Sharks! Holidaying on a superyacht may not be all it's cracked up to be

Can you hear that? Yes, the sound of quiet, pillow-muffled screams emanating from the superyachts bobbing around the Mediterranean. Countless celebrities, one-percenters and shameless hangers-on are miserable, trapped on endless summer boating trips they are obliged to attend (and post about) to keep up appearances among the jet set.

The season began as early as May, courtesy of Bella Hadid, and has since been aggressively rolled out on social media as the Best. Thing. Ever. See Kylie Jenner *(right)* posing through a 12-pic post aboard the 72m Silver Fox (yours to charter for £800,000 a week), courtesy of the athleisure label Alo.

But plenty can go wrong when you vacuum-pack a gaggle of egos in a beige-upholstered boat and anchor them at sea. One experienced yachter, speaking anonymously to spare their hosts, says: "Yachting trips can turn into glamorous prisons. You're stuck on a boat and can't get off. They are usually organised by boring hosts who worry their guests will leave if they don't trap them at sea." Gilded cages, etc.

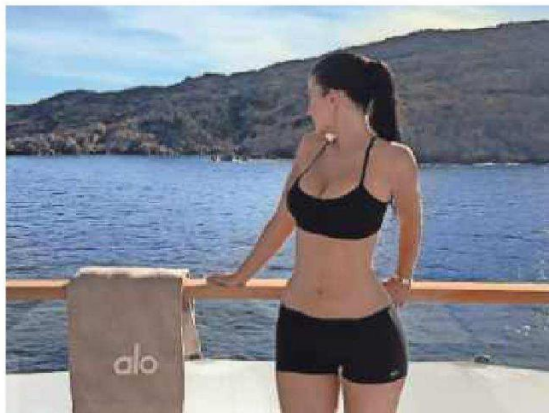
That is assuming you make it on board: getting a late boss on to a yacht that has simply sailed off is the bane of executive assistants' lives. "The boat will leave without you," says Henry Conway, a socialite and member of the yachting class, triggering frantic calls to the crew, cross-border dashes and last-minute hotel bookings until it next reaches port.

Once aboard you had better have invested in large, soft, waterproof luggage: wheeled cases are no friend of the decking. High heels are also unwelcome, except for lunches ashore, but you may have to clamber over rocks to get there. These outings are as precarious as they are expensive, and guests can be expected to pick up the bill as a thank you, "which, depending where you are, can be as expensive as contributing to the food or fuel for the whole boat", Conway says.

Then there are the nautical disasters. Another guest, who has earned their sea stripes but would gladly return them, recalls a Mediterranean trip where "the boat sprang a serious leak, one chap couldn't swim, we all failed the man-overboard drill, almost everyone got seasick and our dinghy was stolen. Oh, and we had to swim for our lives from sharks." Ahoy!

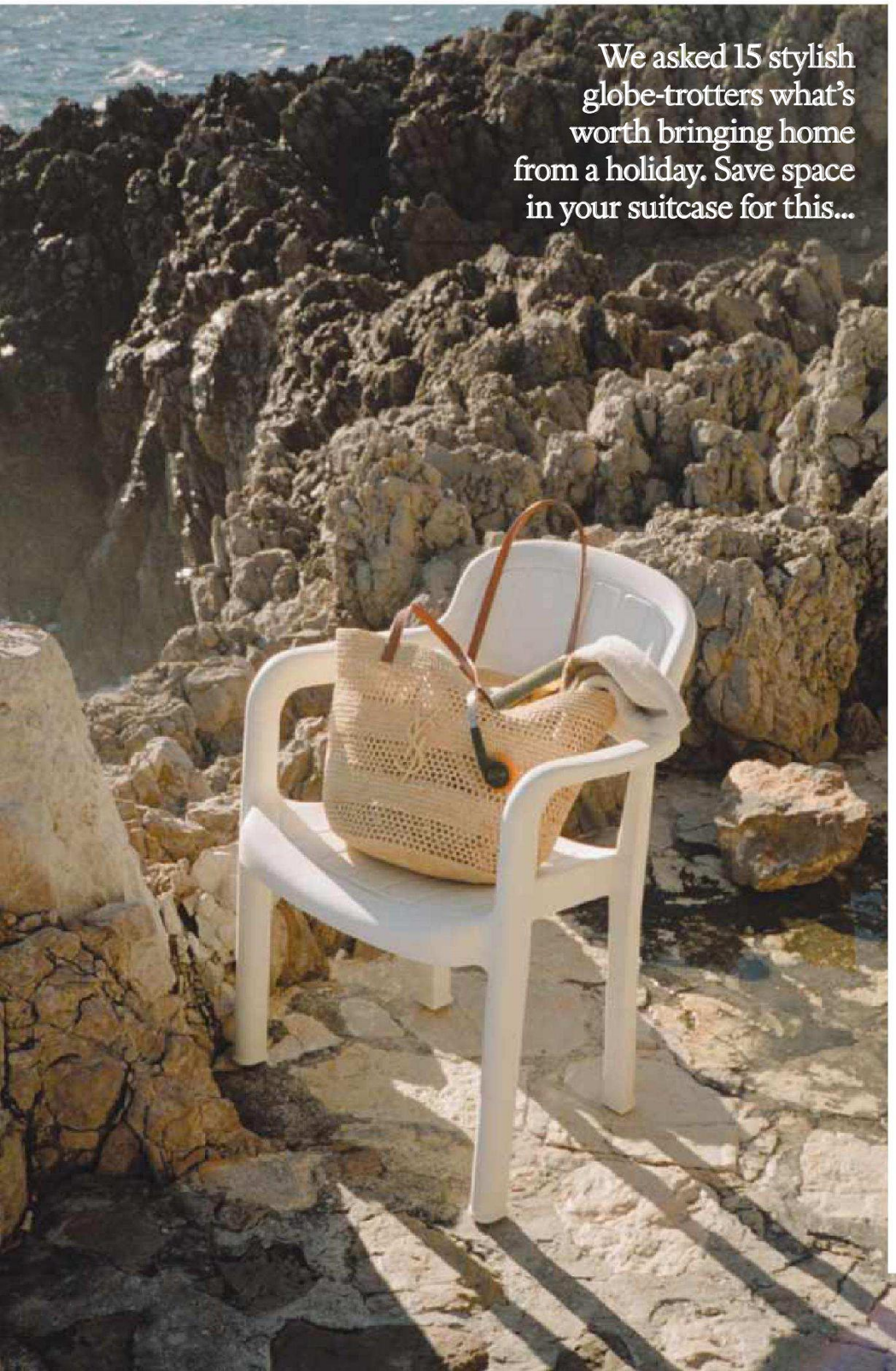
And finally, let's not forget the arguments and sex pests. "Cabin fever is a thing," Conway says. "People who don't get on have a tendency to blow up in small spaces. There can also be handsy friends. Some people will still pinch a bum or two. I have seen people thrown off for that."

So what should a one-percenter do if they must be seen yachting but secretly hate it? Conway reveals some "hop from hotel to hotel with the yacht somewhere nearby". What's £800,000, anyway? ■



SUMMER *lovin'*

WORDS **EMILY CRONIN**



We asked 15 stylish globe-trotters what's worth bringing home from a holiday. Save space in your suitcase for this...

Shirts and socks from Rome

CONNER IVES

Fashion designer

"I had a life-changing visit to Schostal in Rome. It's a tiny shop filled floor to ceiling with the most perfect cotton shirts and pyjamas. I spent an hour there and left with four shirts, linen trousers, some amazing pink boxers and bright red socks — and then went back for gifts for my dog-sitter and friends in London. I may as well not have packed any clothes as I've exclusively worn Schostal since my visit. Oh, and its owner, Shirley Braine, is a legend."

Schostal, Via della Fontanella di Borghese 29, Rome, Italy; schostaloriginals.com

Fish plates from Marseille

EMILY CAMPBELL

Owner and creative director of the clothing brand If Only If

"My husband and I went on the most dreamy, child-free trip to Marseille last summer. One day we visited the city centre and went to Maison Empereur. It's exactly as it sounds: an emporium for your house, done the French way — four floors of chic homeware, from the loveliest-looking loo brushes to lemon garlands to exquisite children's toys. I came away with a truckload, but my favourites were two red ceramic fish plates (**1**). They're completely impractical, but I've hung them in my pantry and they bring me such joy."

Maison Empereur, 4 Rue des Récolettes, Marseille, France; empereur.fr

Cold-pressed coconut oil from Jamaica

SHARMADEAN REID

Founder of the bath and body brand 39BC

"When I'm in Jamaica I always buy pure, cold-pressed coconut oil from roadside stalls where vendors pour it into old rum bottles. The smell is just so beautiful and smoky. Usually the oil has solidified by the time I get to England. When I have a bath, I put the bottle in the water; when I get out, it has all melted. And then I slather myself in it."

Artwork from Lekki, Nigeria

ADEJOKE BAKARE

Chef-patron of Chishuru, London

"The art market in Lekki, Lagos State, offers everything from 1970s vinyl to up-and-coming contemporary art. On my last visit there had been heavy rain and we walked on a network of floorboards over flooded paths. I bought a huge, semi-abstract portrait on canvas of a local woman, painted in vibrant colours. I was drawn to it the second I laid my eyes on it. I've been in London over 25 years now but that portrait transports me to Lagos whenever I look at it."

Lekki Art Market, Oba Elegushi Street, Lekki Peninsula II, Lekki, Nigeria; @lekkiartmarket

Custom stationery from Venice
LAURA JACKSON
Founder of the homeware company Glassette
"For my 40th birthday, Jon, my husband, ordered me personalised stationery from a tiny traditional letterpress shop in Venice. It hasn't arrived yet but I can't wait."
Gianni Basso Stampatore, Calle del Fumo, Venice, Italy

Wild sesame oil from South Korea
REJINA PYO
Fashion designer and artist
"It's impossible to find the kind of artisanal sesame oil I like in the UK. But in Korea you can get wild sesame oil. It's next level. Once you taste it you'll be obsessed."

Handwoven hammocks from the Yucatan peninsula, Mexico
ZOË PASKIN
Cofounder of the hospitality company Studio Paskin
"The hammocks (**2**) made in this part of Mexico — particularly in and around Merida — are handwoven from cotton or nylon in a technique passed down through generations of Mayan artisans. The colourways are extraordinary: saturated pinks, yellows, greens and blues that shouldn't work together and somehow always do. They're also genuinely functional: built for heat, built for long afternoons with a book and nowhere urgent to be."
Similar hammocks are available at Cielo Hamacas in Merida and Mexico City; cielohammocks.eu

Vintage treasures from Paris
TRISH WESCOAT POUND
Founder of the fashion brand TWP
"Don't miss Chez Sarah in Paris at Saint Ouen. The store carries the best vintage clothes and afterwards you can walk around the flea market. I once found a beautiful Mugler dress — I think my daughter Jillian has stolen it."
Chez Sarah, 18 Rue Jules Vallès, Saint Ouen sur Seine, Paris, France; chezsarah.net

Brass paperweights from Vienna
BRYONY SHERIDAN
Buying director at the interiors brand Abask
"Vienna is one of my favourite cities for design. I always seek out Carl Auböck's beautifully crafted brass objects (**3**). Run by the fourth generation of the Auböck family, the workshop creates sculptural brass objects that blur the line between art and function. They're timeless pieces that you'll treasure for a lifetime."
Carl Auböck Workshop, Bernardgasse 21, Vienna, Austria; abask.com

Candles from Lisbon
ALICE WAWRIK
Creative consultant and sourcing expert
"Caza das Vellas Loreto is one of the oldest candle shops in the world and, I think, one of the most enchanting shopping experiences in Lisbon. I have a slight obsession with faux fruit — I keep a bowl of vintage Murano glass fruits on my dining table at all times — so naturally I was drawn to the fruit candles. On my first visit I left with a glossy red apple. Last May I added a wonderfully realistic watermelon. Had I had more space in my hand luggage, I would have filled it with pears, lemons, oranges, toadstool mushrooms and armfuls of their beautiful coloured dinner candles. I can't wait to go back."
Caza das Vellas Loreto, Rua do Loreto 53, Lisbon, Portugal; cazavellasloreto.com.pt

Baskets from the Dordogne
PAULE TENAILLON
Cofounder and creative director of the shoe brand Nomasei
"In the gorgeous village of Saint Jean de Côle in the Dordogne, there is a little workshop and store called Atelier de Vannerie where the artist Madeline Rey makes beautiful baskets (**4**) and other objects by hand. Rey and her interns often demonstrate weaving techniques for clients — it's hypnotic to watch."
Atelier de Vannerie, 6 Rue du Fond du Bourg, Saint Jean de Côle, France; @vertige_vannerie

Art books from Naoshima, Japan
ANNA JEWSBURY
Artistic director of the jewellery label Completedworks
"Naoshima is such an incredible destination for contemporary art and architecture, but also a place to slow down. It's somewhere that leaves me feeling creatively replenished and I always seem to come back with a suitcase full of art and architecture books. The museum shops are great. I love finding postcards, exhibition catalogues and monographs that you just can't get elsewhere. They're the souvenirs I always return to long after the trip is over."
Bennesse Art Site, Naoshima, Kagawa District, Japan; benesse-artsite.jp

Combs from Tokyo
ULLA JOHNSON
Fashion designer
"I go to Yonoya Comb Shop in Asakusa, Tokyo, for traditional handmade Japanese boxwood combs."
Yonoya Comb Shop, 1-37-10 Asakusa, Taito-ku, Tokyo; yonoya.com

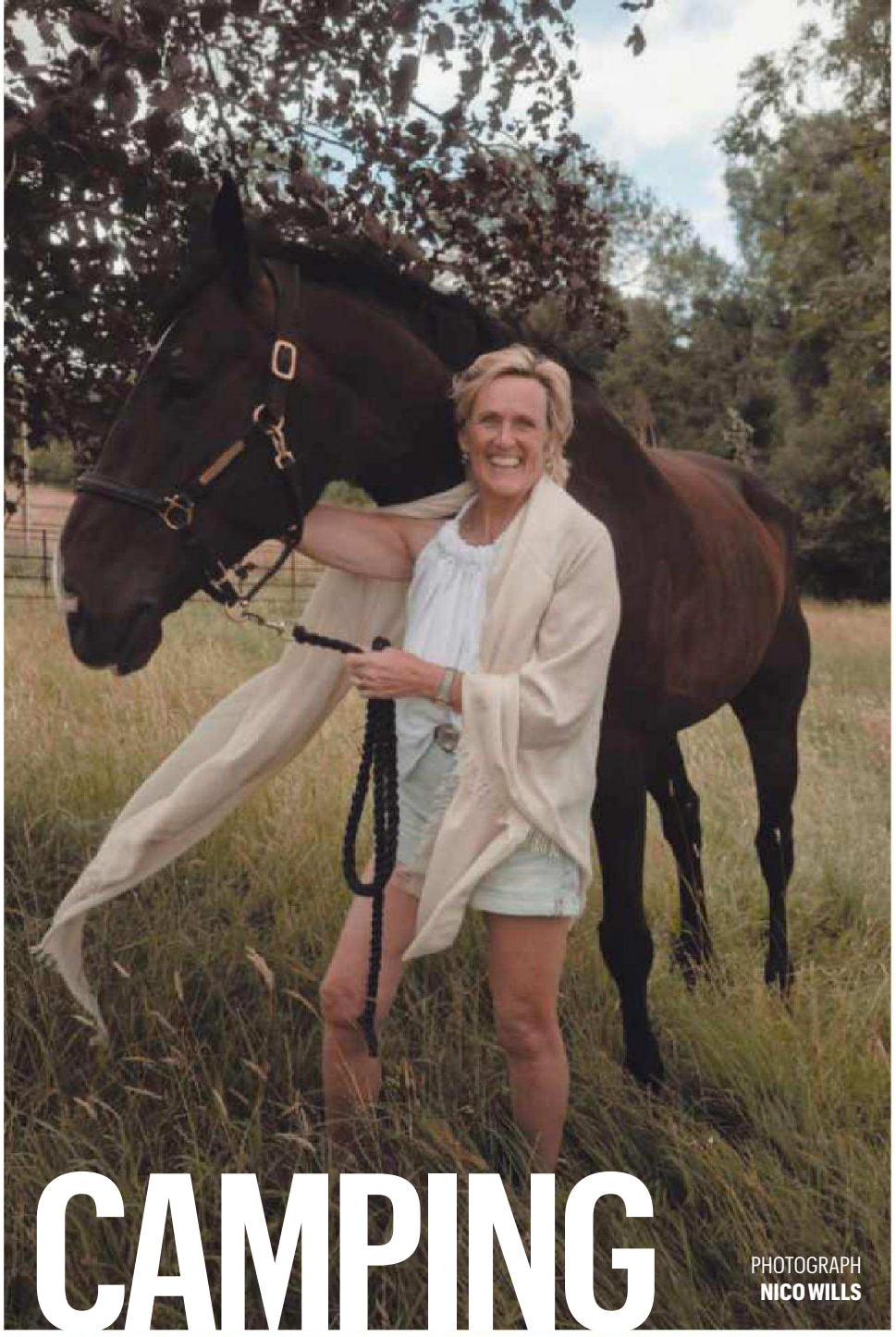
Crochet tablecloths from Crete
AMY SHAW
Founder and designer of the womenswear brand Fuchsia Shaw
"Walking through the Rethymnon Old Town in Crete eating ice cream recently, I stumbled upon a shop selling beautiful handmade tablecloths and linens. I chose a crochet tablecloth that the lady running the shop had made herself. It's super-delicate and intricate, with a subtle floral pattern."
Similar products are available at Evangeline, Kon/nou Paleologou 35, Rethymnon, Crete, Greece

Eucalyptus solution from Australia
YASMIN SEWELL
Founder of the wellness brand Vyrao
"I don't use cleaning sprays or anything toxic in my house, so I come back [from Australia] with Bosisto's pure eucalyptus solution, mix it with water and use it to spray and wipe everything down. My whole house smells like eucalyptus. Everyone I know brings it back for me when they go to Australia."
bosistos.com.au

Courtesy of Saint Laurent

Twenty years ago Jennifer Oldman was working as a criminal barrister when she decided to pitch some luxury tents in her Somerset field. ***Vassi Chamberlain*** meets the woman who invented glamping

Carry on CAMPING



PHOTOGRAPH **NICO WILLS**

It's the last weekend of June and I am standing on a high promontory at Cockmill Farm in Somerset overlooking the empty but verdantly luscious fields of Worthy Farm, home to the Glastonbury Festival for the past 56 years, its deserted Pyramid Stage rising up like an ancient monument in the distance.

The festival took a break this year, as it usually does every five, to give the land a rest, but its absence this summer might have been a relief for the person I have come to meet — Jennifer Oldland, 70, the founder of Camp Kerala, the luxury hospitality camping company (one of about twenty independent ones that pop up in adjacent fields outside the festival grounds). She is widely credited with creating the modern concept of "glamping" and Camp Kerala celebrated its 20th anniversary last year.

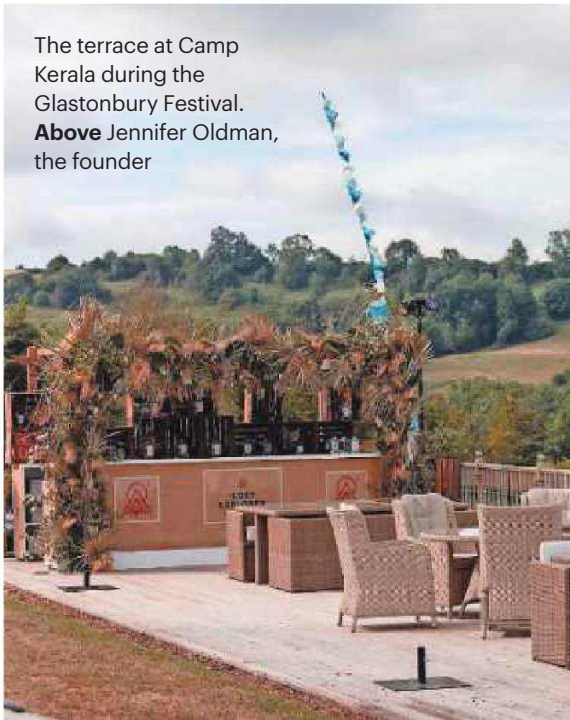
"Would you like a cup of tea," asks Oldland, a friendly, sprightly and smartly dressed blonde with an upper-class accent, perhaps the least likely person you'd imagine partying in a field with spaced-out festivalgoers.

What started in her Somerset farm has now expanded to other music festivals, including the Isle of Wight (pre-Covid) and Wonderfruit in Thailand, as well as sporting events (the British Grand Prix and the Ryder Cup) and private parties. Last year Camp Kerala launched Shift, a wellness event with pop-ups across the country.

Twenty years ago Oldland's life couldn't have looked more different — she was working as a highly respected criminal barrister in London and had recently divorced. When her ex-husband moved to Taunton she started looking for somewhere to buy in the area so their three children wouldn't have far to travel to visit their father.

She fell in love with Cockmill at first sight and put in an offer. But what she had failed to notice was that the farm directly overlooked the festival's grounds.

"The only thing I really worried about," she says, "was whether helicopters coming in and out of Yeovil would bother me." She moved in in late 2000 and, as 2001 was a year off, it was only when Glastonbury returned in 2002 that she witnessed for the first time how a vast city rose at the bottom of her garden. She wrote a letter to Michael Eavis (Glastonbury's founder) protesting. "Your



The terrace at Camp Kerala during the Glastonbury Festival. **Above** Jennifer Oldman, the founder

festival is going to ruin my life," she said. Much to her surprise Eavis turned up at her farm in his Land Rover. The pair chatted and have been great friends ever since.

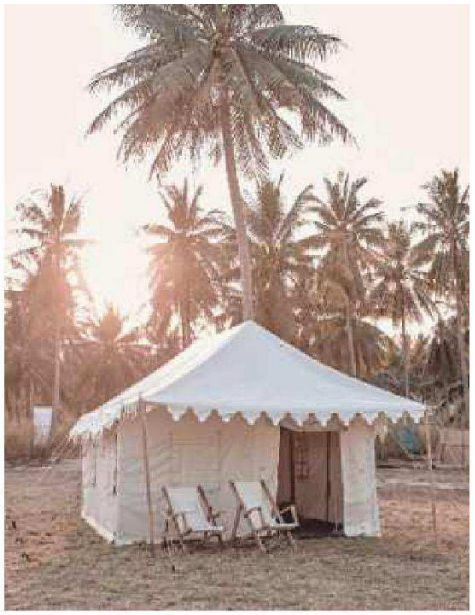
When friends came to stay with her during the festival she noticed how much they loved returning to the farm every night, to relax in a hot bath, sleep in a comfy bed and eat good food. "I remember being up on the hill one day thinking, there's a hole in the market and I was sitting on an absolute goldmine," she says.

It was her lightbulb moment. Overnight she quit her law career and launched the first Camp Kerala. "My friends thought I was mad as a coot," she says. "Completely bonkers." Undeterred she ploughed all her savings into making it happen.

"To begin with it was absolute chaos," she says, "but to quote Nietzsche: 'One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.'" Her masterstroke, which came to define Camp Kerala, was the beautiful Indian Shikar tents she imported from Jodhpur, which she had discovered years earlier while on safari in the Masai Mara. She tracked down the manufacturers and flew out to Rajasthan, bought 30 tents (the wall linings are covered with hand-woven stars) and filled them with handcrafted furniture, sheepskin rugs, fresh flowers, king-size beds and Egyptian cotton sheets.

Across all its events Camp K now offers about a hundred tents (depending on the event) that cost from £30,000 for two people — prices increase with add-ons such as wet rooms. The Glastonbury 2027 experience also includes two tickets to the festival.

'Friends thought I was mad as a coot when I quit my law career. Completely bonkers'



From left A Camp Kerala Shikar tent at Wonderfruit in Thailand; a tent interior complete with a king-size bed

Last year they introduced something called "puppies in bed". "What else would you want for a hangover breakfast," her son, Bertie, tells me later "than a full English and a puppy for cuddles." Indeed.

In addition to the puppies, there's a specially dedicated "hangover" spa area (with IV drips, hot tubs, cold plunges, an oxygen chamber, a sauna and a gym), a salon, an AllSaints shop (the brand is one of Camp Kerala's sponsors), two restaurants (one is called Saffron & Fire), a pub and a dancefloor.

Does she go to festivals herself? "Absolutely, I had no idea I loved music so much. I never used to listen to it, but now I've become really quite cool," she says, laughing. She shows me a photo of herself and her son at Burning Man. A former barrister at America's "*Mad Max* meets Dr Seuss" festival, as it has been described, where house and techno is the predominant vibe, surely not? "Yes, we go every year," she says. Who's her favourite act now? "I love Bicep," she says immediately, of the acclaimed dance music duo.

Her biggest surprise was when her three now grown-up children told her they wanted to join the business. Today it's very much a family affair, with all of them working together. While she operates as front of house, they manage back-end operations. Bertie, who walks me around the farm, oversees finance and their expansion into wellness and sporting hospitality, while Georgia leads sales and design, and Freya manages sponsorship, partnerships and HR.

The question of wellness arose following Oldland's diagnosis with breast cancer in July 2024, following a mammogram in a pop-up test centre in the car park of her local B&Q. "I had absolutely no symptoms," she says. "There I was going flat out in this wonderful world I was living in and suddenly I was diagnosed at 68. Apparently that's the danger zone. I never knew that. That's why I tell women: go and get tested."

Following a double mastectomy, chemotherapy and immunotherapy, she started to rethink the way she lived her life and, importantly, her perspective on self-care, so she launched Shift. "It's a regenerative experience, not a retreat. I really don't like that word."

Oldland is the perfect example of how age needn't be a deterrent to starting from scratch. "It's empowering for women to know that at the age of 49, I changed my life. When we began the business, we genuinely had no idea what we were doing. But 20 years on, look at what we've achieved. The greatest dreams are realised when you least expect them."

She then mentions another dream she'd quite like to fulfil. "I'd like Kevin Costner to come and stay with us one year. Do you remember him in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*? That's when I lost my heart to him. Can you tell him there's a crazy tent lady in Somerset looking for her final pivot."

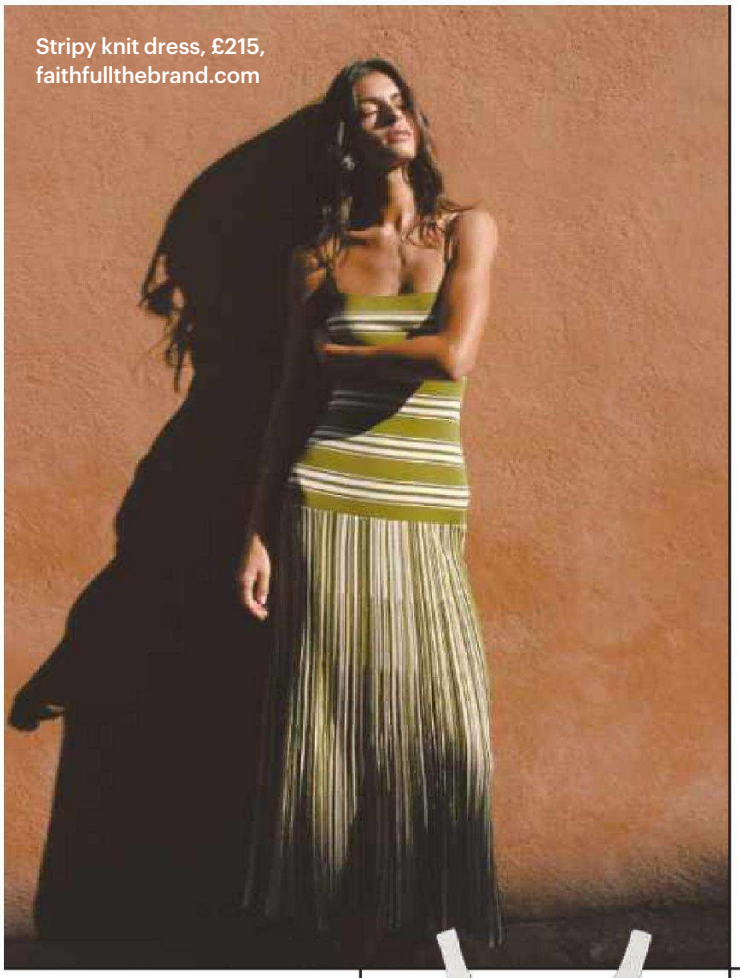
She recently celebrated her business's 20th anniversary with a party in the Diageo headquarters in Great Marlborough Street, London. "On my way there I walked past my old magistrate's court and I thought to myself, 'What the heck!' I used to beat those pavements shaking, holding legal folders I'd been handed at 6pm the night before, and going into court to be chewed up by some magistrate or judge, and there I was 20 years later. What an extraordinary thing life is. Never in a million years did I think I would become a tent lady." ■

campkerala.com

One FOR ALL

A drop-waist dress is the high-summer hit you'll want to wear to every event

EDIT **HELEN ATKIN**


Stripy knit dress, £215, faithfullthebrand.com

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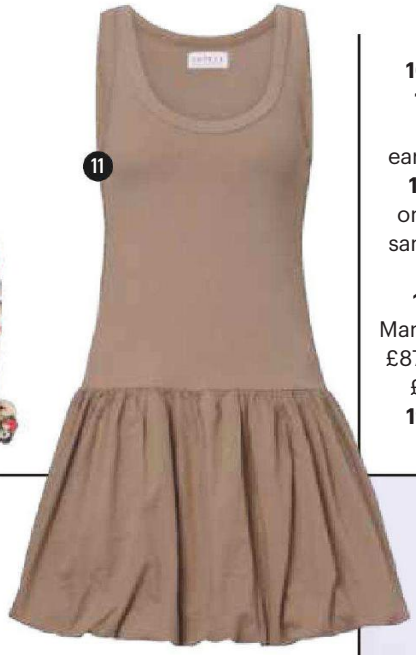
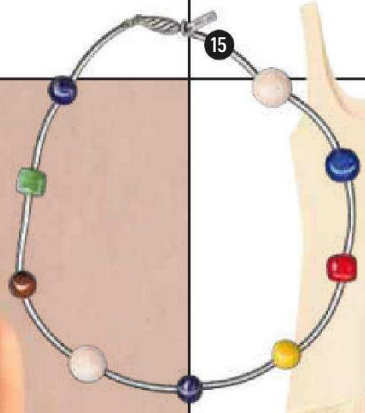
1 Asymmetric dress, £20, hm.com. **2** Sandals, £265, staud.clothing. **3** Blue dress, £375, Polo Ralph Lauren, ralphlauren.co.uk. **4** Grey mididress, £420, stagni.com. **5** White minidress, £2,800, Alaïa, net-a-porter.com. **6** Earrings, £205, shopjulietta.com. **7** Bag, £695, joseph-fashion.com. **8** Red jersey dress, £125, Loulou de Saison, thefrankie shop.com. **9** Jersey mididress, £28, marksandspencer.com

10 Bag, £485, cultgaia.com. **11** Minidress, £240, Velvet, mytheresa.com. **12** Hoop earrings, £160, otiumberg.com. **13** Sunglasses, £165, chimi-online.com. **14** Loafers, £200, sandro-paris.com. **15** Necklace, £80, alairealaire.com. **16** Asymmetric dress, £80, Mango, next.co.uk. **17** Tank dress, £87, stories.com. **18** Navy dress, £915, mariamcmanus.com. **19** Ballet flats, £85, cos.com





Bubble-hem dress, £75, whistles.com

SHOP WITH STYLE

What our editor ***Laura Atkinson*** loves this week

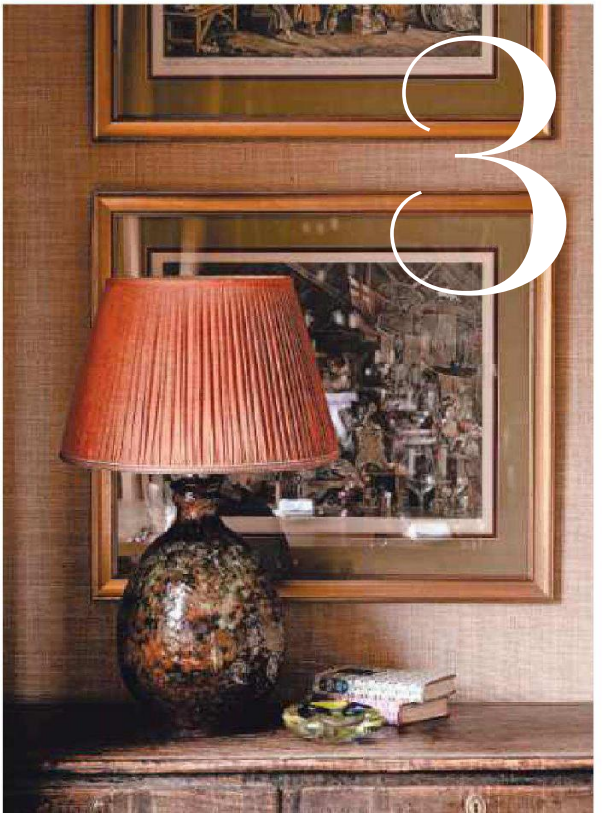
1

BLACK MAGIC
Despite all the talk about what the "new" black swimsuit actually is, I've decided to stick to the original. With a scoop back and a textured finish, this one from Next will be gracing the beaches of Europe for many a summer to come. £38, next.co.uk

2

OFFICE DRESSING
It's still rather warm to be wearing a suit to the office, but when a big meeting hits my diary I need something that gives the same effect. Enter Noon by Noor's cinched-waist silk jacket for smartness without the sleeves. £1,410, noonbynoor.com

LIGHTS OUT
You can never have enough table lamps — so I plan on adding to my collection with one of Arcove's gorgeous gathered shades. £280, arcove-london.com



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Alexandra Cameron

4

SHIELDS UP
I usually reach for a classic frame when selecting sunglasses, but having seen shield sunnies make something of a comeback, I think I might be for turning. Bold and black, these Celine frames get my vote. £380, celine.com

5 BASKET CASE

I love the shape of JW Anderson's Loafer bag and this summer's variation made from chocolate-brown woven leather has caught my eye. Basket-like in style, it's a practical way of channelling the French Riviera in the city. £1,440, jwanderson.com

6 SUMMER, BOTTLED

I haven't stopped spritzing this zingy but sexy scent all season. Inspired by Amanzoe, Aman's Greek resort, it opens with fresh citrus, before drying down to something warmer and muskier. Mavi Fine Fragrance, £220 for 50ml EDP, Aman, harrods.com

7 ACCEPTABLE IN THE EIGHTIES

There's no quicker way to give a summer outfit a lift than putting on a pair of large earrings. These ones from Holland Cooper are just the right side of Eighties throwback. £69, hollandcooper.com

8 SEASONAL CHANGE

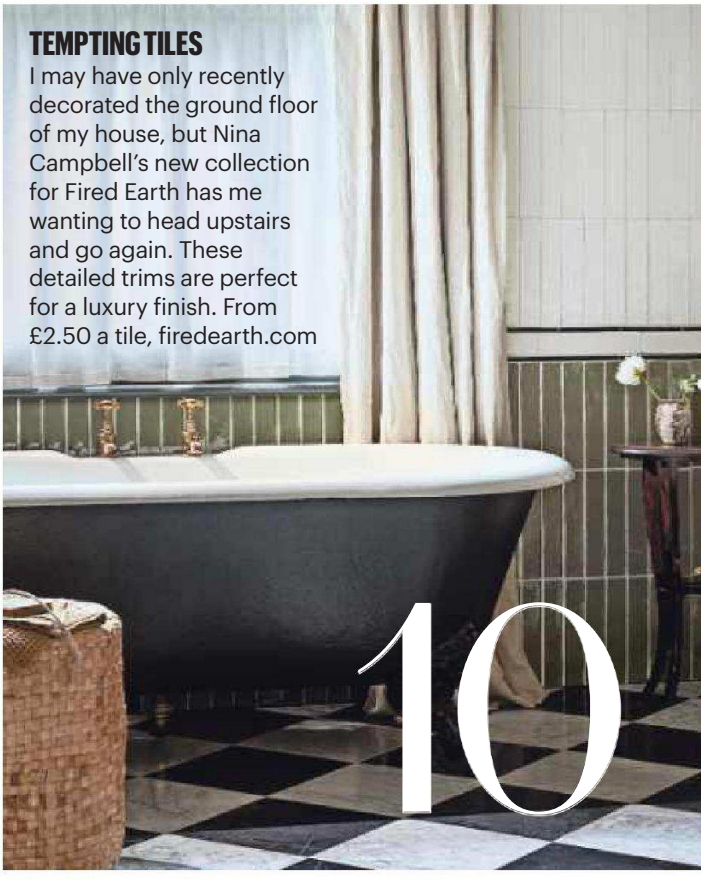
This skirt from Joseph is my latest cross-season purchase. I'm planning on wearing it with a vest top and sandals for summer, and then switching it up with knee-high boots and a tailored jacket when the temperature drops. £375, joseph-fashion.com

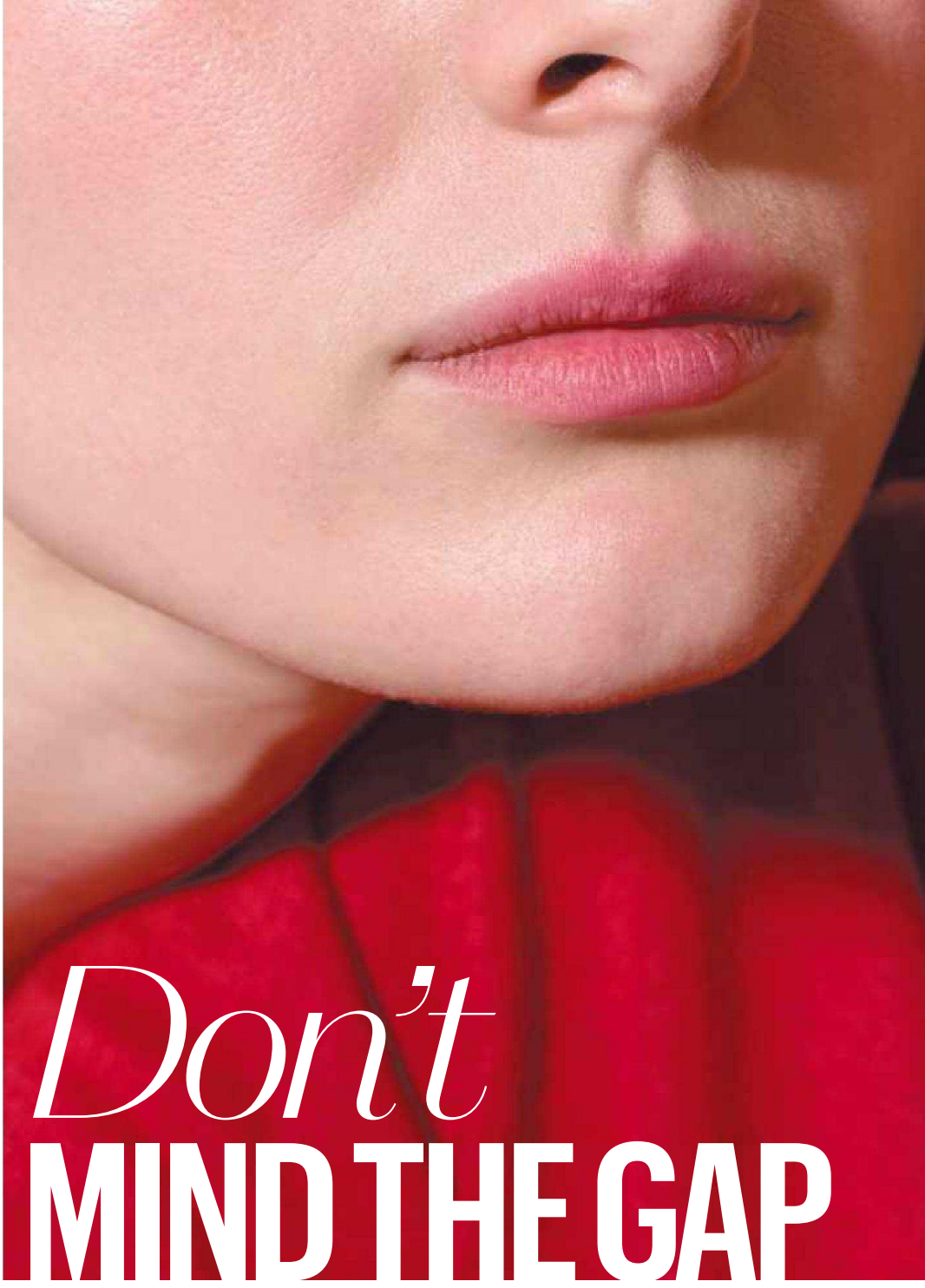
9 POWER UP

Peptides are all the rage, and for good reason — they help stimulate collagen production so skin looks plumper and perkier. M&S Formula Ultra Peptide Serum has moisture-locking ceramides too. £29, from Thursday, marksandspencer.com

10 TEMPTING TILES

I may have only recently decorated the ground floor of my house, but Nina Campbell's new collection for Fired Earth has me wanting to head upstairs and go again. These detailed trims are perfect for a luxury finish. From £2.50 a tile, firedearth.com





Don't MIND THE GAP

Kirsty Lockwood, 36, revels in her friendships with women of a different generation — so much so that she has used the experience in her debut novel

On a honeyed afternoon in September 2012 I caught the first glimpse of some of the women who would become an integral part of my life for the following decade.

We parked up behind the letting agent's van. The narrow cul-de-sac was lined with trees, handsome detached houses on one side and a tight row of four-in-a-block sandstone tenements on the other. The women were sitting in one of the two front gardens that sandwiched the communal front door. A sad rectangle of garden that would soon become mine was forlorn; weeds had claimed the raised beds and the fierce sunshine only served to highlight this was a space that was unloved and unlived in.

By contrast, Maureen's garden, where she was sitting with another neighbour, was a riot of colour and care. The two women were enjoying an afternoon tipple in the sun, and before we passed the threshold they interrogated our suitability as prospective neighbours with characteristic Glaswegian wit and a twinkle in their eyes.

I was in my early twenties, with no idea about where life would take me or even what I truly wanted from it, but in that moment I was sure of one thing: I wanted to live alongside these effortlessly cool older women. I wanted to be part of their gang.

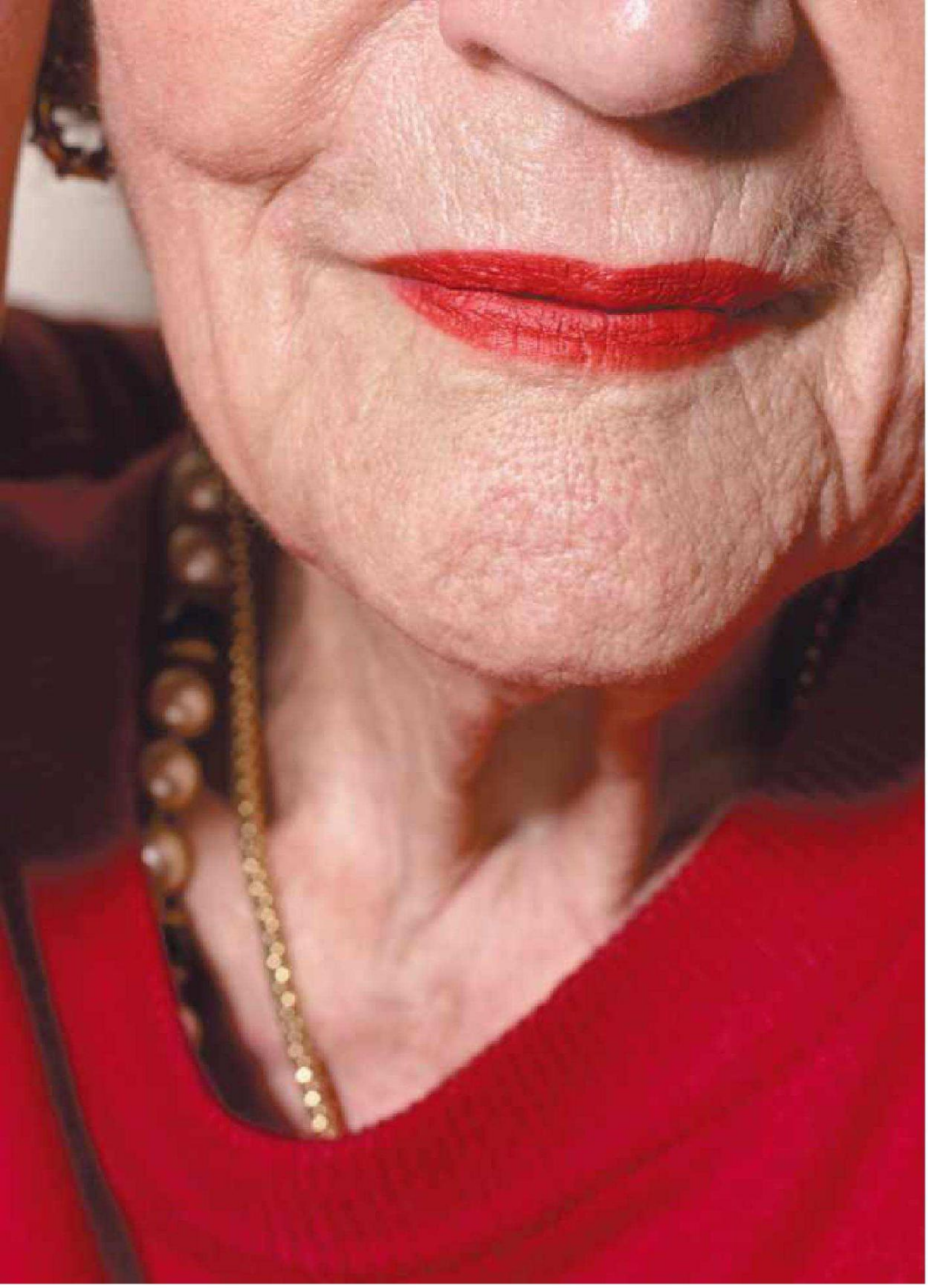
According to research conducted by YouGov, nearly four in ten adults have a close friend from a different generation, and more than half of Britons have a friendship with a ten-year age gap. In a time of increasing societal division and polarisation, it seems that many people, like me, are reaping the unique benefits that come with age-gap friendships.

Meg, 42, from Gloucestershire, is one of them: she has met many good friends who are far older than she is through working at her studio, where she teaches the art of making stained glass. "We can share what's going on in our own lives and there is no judgment," she says. "We genuinely care about each other. I want to know about their grandchildren and their children — who are perhaps older than I am. They want to know about my children. We have similar experiences and very different ones. They get an insight into how different things can be these days for young people, and again, hopefully this keeps them young too."

Meg shares a similar connection with her aunt, who, she says, she has always viewed as more of a big sister figure, despite their 25-year age gap. "As adults we've travelled together, we've experienced life. To me she is a port of calm in my world. She offers me guidance without judgment, support without debt. She provides me with an insight that comes from experience and wisdom that I perhaps haven't considered."

The richness of experience that comes with an age-gap friendship is something I have benefited from too. Over the past 14 years the gang of fifty, sixty, seventy and eightysomething women that I live alongside have been there with me through those seismic events that mark all our lives — the ones that change who we are as people and hold the potential to knock us off our feet. When my daughter was born and I felt out of my depth as a new mother, for instance, I took great comfort from knowing that many decades of parenting experience resided a few weary steps from my front door. Whether it was the death of both of my parents or far more trivial matters — such as the nerves I felt before my first attempt at public speaking — it is reassuring to know that they are always there.

Emma, 47, from Brighton, met her older friend through volunteering and says that their friendship is something that greatly benefits them both. "I love to hear stories from when she was younger and learn about what life was like nearly 90 years ago," Emma explains. "I share with her the way of the world at the moment, and we love



Karin Berndl/Art Partner Licensing/Trunk Archive, Cara Davidson Photography

hearing about each other's families. We have found common ground on so many areas despite the age difference and are never short of conversation."

Given how impactful age-gap friendships have been in my life, it is something I wanted to explore in my debut novel, which charts an unlikely friendship between eightysomething Amos and 19-year-old Odette, whose heart-warming pairing transforms them into social media stars.

Indeed, the algorithm knows I'm a sucker for heartwarming content, and I often see versions of these age-gap friendships play out online, whether it's Italian grandmothers teaching recipes to their Gen Z buddies or videos of young people learning to knit at the hip of their much older friend. There's something captivating about seeing people

Below Kirsty Lockwood, front and centre, with her friends of different generations, from left: Liz, Kirstin, Anne-Marie and Maureen. **Bottom** Lockwood earlier this year

finding common ground and enjoyment with one another across the age divide.

Friendship doesn't have an age limit, and we need it now more than ever. While we know about the dangers of loneliness and social isolation among the older generation, we shouldn't forget the similar risks facing the young. Over the ten years to 2021 the proportion of under-35s who said they had just one or no close friends more than trebled from 7 per cent to 22 per cent. And despite — or perhaps because of — the technological advances that make staying connected online easier than ever before, research for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport found that young people are now more than five times more likely to struggle with chronic loneliness than those over the age of 65.

For Emma the offline connection she has with her older friend is something precious. "Visiting her seems like the way life is supposed to be," she says. "We don't have family nearby, and it feels like the way life is now, we don't often come into contact with older people. I've loved building a relationship this way. There is something so enjoyable and underrated about having a good old-fashioned chat, no technology involved, and building a connection with another human being."

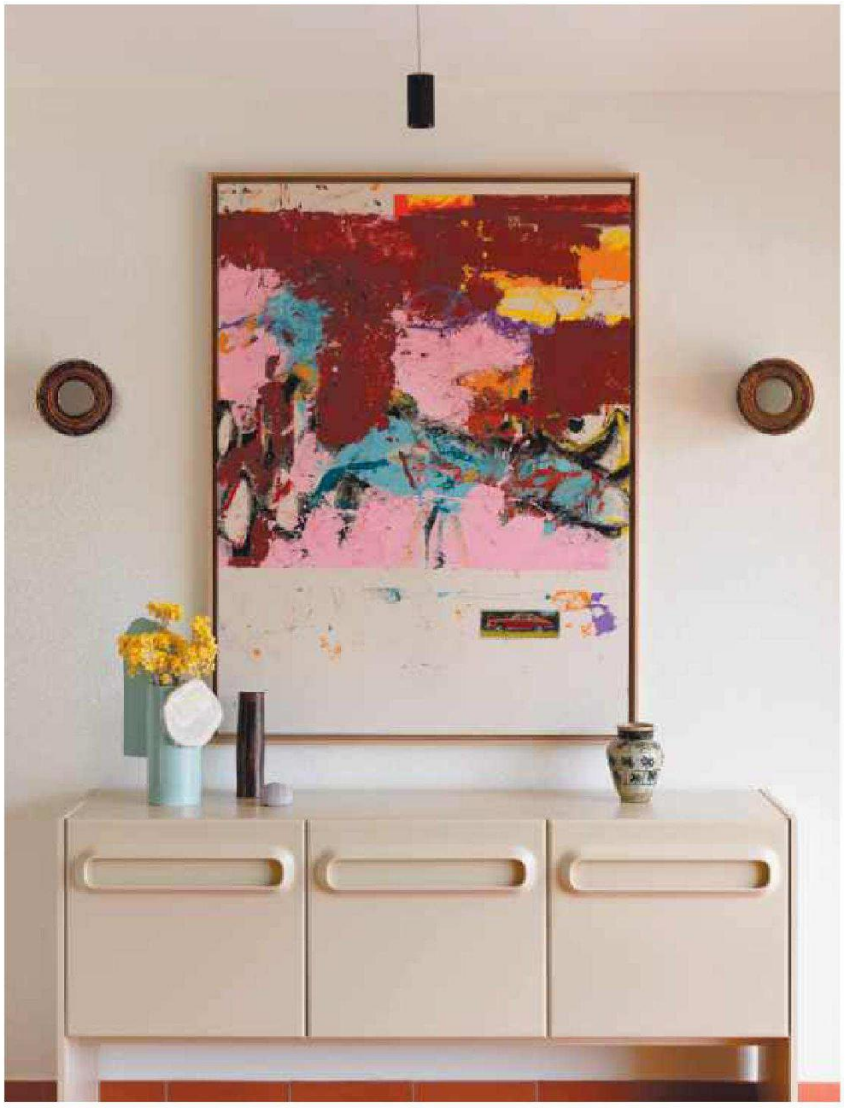
In my experience the most transformative friendships can be found among people at differing stages of life — and this is something Meg has found to be true in her life too. "My older friends have lived very different lives from me, but through conversations we find that things aren't so different after all. Life moves so fast these days, it's hard to keep up. Sometimes stopping and chatting with someone from a different generation just gives us a reason to pause and see that we aren't so different after all." ■

We Know What You Did by Kirsty Lockwood (Orion £20). To order a copy go to timesbookshop.co.uk or call 020 3176 2935. Free UK standard P&P on online orders over £25. Special discount available for Times+ members

A bigger SPLASH

This modernist French villa on the edge of the sea is the perfect retreat for a creative couple and their young family

WORDS **IAN PHILLIPS** PHOTOGRAPHS **STEPHAN JULLIARD**

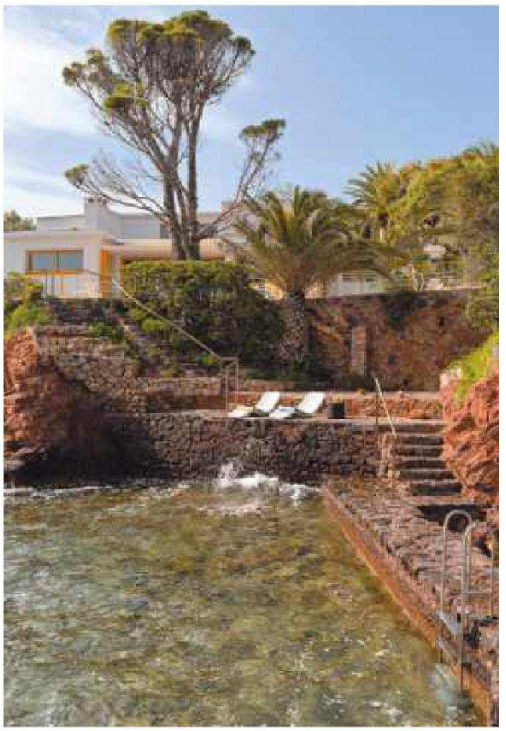


When the Lyon-based interior designers Margaux Lally and Luc Berger retreat to their holiday home on the French Riviera, they feel like they've escaped to a different world. "You have the impression of being completely on your own," Berger says. "There's the Mediterranean, us and that's it," Lally adds.

The house in question is located in the Var region and offers direct access to the sea. Nestled downhill from the coast road, it is more or less invisible to passers-by. Today, it would be impossible to develop such a property. In 1986 France passed a law known as the *Loi Littoral*, forbidding construction within a hundred-metre strip of its shores.

That, however, was not a concern when it was built back in the Fifties by an industrialist and his wife, who decided to adopt a distinctly modernist aesthetic. The structure was equipped with a sleek roof terrace and made from concrete. At some time in the Seventies, a guest room was added on top, accessed only via an external staircase. Then, for decades, nothing much happened, until Lally, 39, and Berger, 37, decided to transform it for themselves.

The couple met as students at the École Supérieure d'Architecture Intérieure in Lyon. Since setting up their firm in 2016, their projects have included private residences, the bar/restaurant at the Club Port La Galère in the south of France and the five-star Le Yule hotel in Val d'Isère. For the past several years they have also been busy renovating many of the 160 rooms and suites of Le Meurice, one of Paris's most renowned hotels, where Salvador Dalí took up residence for one month a year from 1950 until his death. ➤



Opposite Built in the Fifties, the villa has a privileged location, with direct access to the sea. **Top** A painting by Patrick Guidot hangs above a Space sideboard from HKLiving in the dining area. **Above left** The dining table by the carpenter René Martin is original to the house. **Above right** A staircase leads down from the terrace to a small swimming jetty

Above The green tiles from Cevica in the ground-floor shower room are a nod to the pine trees found in the region. The stool is by the Swiss design studio Hot Wire Extensions. **Above right** A 1980s Banana armchair by Tom Dixon on the terrace of one of the six bedrooms

The renovation of the St Raphaël villa presented them with a number of challenges, not least increasing the number of bedrooms from four to six to accommodate their wider family. The local building regulations, however, prevented them from adding an extension. Instead, they transformed part of the garage on the upper level into a child's room and took a distinctly minimalist approach to the other bedrooms. "We chose to consider them as space dedicated solely to sleeping," Berger explains. "A bed, a wardrobe and that was that."

They also added a new internal staircase and aimed to create the largest, most open living room possible. The latter was not without its complications owing to an obtuse angle in one corner. The solution they came up with was to install a welcoming custom-made banquette along the two walls. At more than 4.5m in length, it serves as a perfect gathering spot and is also equipped with a ledge at the back for displaying paintings. "The ceiling height is quite low and there was the risk that the space would have felt cramped if we'd hung artworks on the wall," Lally says.

Aesthetically, the pair were keen to retain the spirit of the original house. They were adamant about keeping the fireplace. "It's unique and helps to connect the different zones," Berger says. They also maintained the yellow of the windows. "The colour is very much part of the house's identity," Lally adds. There was already one round, porthole-like opening in place, which they chose to duplicate several times, even copying its distinctive criss-cross metal security grill. The floors inside had always been terracotta. They decided to work with the same material but to give them a more contemporary twist by laying the tiles in eye-catching geometric patterns.

Lally and Berger also wanted the house to reflect its setting. The touches of blue are obvious references to the sea and sky. The green tiles in the downstairs bathroom are a nod to the profusion of pine trees in the area, while the snake motif on the bespoke rug in the living room relates to the presence of vipers in the surrounding Esterel mountains. They also commissioned the decorative artist Françoise Foraison to paint friezes above several windows, inspired by traditional Mediterranean motifs.

When it came to the furniture, their starting point was a series of pieces in pine, which were still in situ and had been created specifically for the house in the Fifties by a woodworker called René Martin, who collaborated with the architect and designer Charlotte Perriand. They include the dining table, a set of stools and a desk unit in one of the upstairs bedrooms. Lally and Berger maintained the vintage feel by adding a pair of Carlo Hauner armchairs and a Pierre Chapo coffee

Outdoors, the duo duplicated an existing porthole-style window. **Right** Graphic two-tone terracotta tiles from Pierre Boutal were used on the stairs

A custom banquette clad in the outdoor fabric Promenade by Nobilis occupies one corner of the living room. The Caducée rug is a custom design by Lally Berger, while the two vintage wood and rope armchairs in front of the fireplace were designed by Carlo Hauner. **Below** Margaux Lally and Luc Berger

'Our aim was that it wouldn't have to be redone every five years. We wanted to create a style that would stand the test of time'

table in the living room, as well as the Banana chair designed by Tom Dixon in the Eighties on one of the bedroom balconies. A particularly fortuitous find was the Déesse (Goddess) ceramic sculpture by Denise Picard that resides at the bottom of the stairs. "It's as if it were made for the house," Lally says. "It's perfect both in terms of style and colour."

Now that it's complete the villa acts as the perfect holiday hideaway for the couple and their two young children. When in residence they find it hard to leave. They simply go out once a week to do some food shopping and regularly paddleboard to a small neighbouring island from their pontoon. It's a place they plan to keep for many years. "Our aim was that it wouldn't have to be redone every five years," Lally says. "We wanted to create a style that would stand the test of time." ■

lallyberger.com

Table FOR TWO, PLEASE

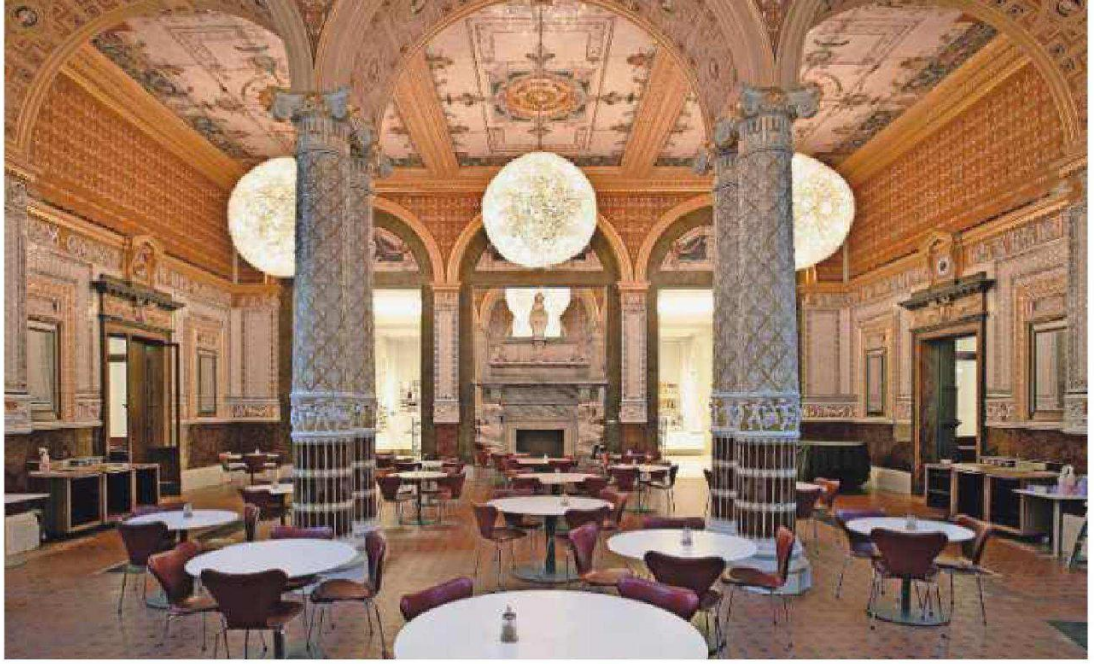
Whether it's cosy booths or cheffy kitchens, restaurant design is all the rage in our homes right now, says ***Nicky Rampley-Clarke***

Top Ham Interiors created this kitchen corner banquette for a house in Notting Hill. **Above** Atkar Islam's SieMatic kitchen, with Gaggenau appliances, is a calm, functional space to work and socialise. **Right** Clodagh McKenna's mustard and caramel-coloured kitchen is arranged around a central marble-topped island, with multifunctional range cooker

The cost of fine dining is sky-high at the moment, which probably explains why even the wealthiest foodies are wincing when the bill is placed on the table and they can't put it on expenses. It's hardly surprising, then, that those who love their decor as much as their dinner are recreating the restaurant aesthetic at home, from cosy banquettes for hot dates to soft lighting to set the mood, and sleek kitchens in which even the likes of Jackson Boxer — chef-patron of the London hotspot Vesper — would happily cook up a storm.

There's plenty of food for thought. On social media, the content creator Nick Angione renovated his bathroom based on the one at the Polo Bar in New York — "not an exact replica, just a few details I've always loved, from the green tiles to the brass fixtures" — while in Apple TV's *Cape Fear*, it's the kitchen banquette that's serving up the real thrills. This side of the Atlantic, professionals are incorporating restaurant-inspired interiors into their own homes. The chef Atkar Islam's dark timber SieMatic kitchen flows seamlessly into the dining room to encourage interaction between himself and guests when he's cooking — just like in his two Michelin-starred restaurant Opheem in Birmingham.

Meanwhile, the cookbook author and TV presenter Clodagh McKenna's foodie-inspired kitchen palette of mustard and caramel prioritises similar interaction, with dark cabinetry wrapping around a central island. Further cheffy touches come in the shape of a double butler's sink, hooks for hanging pots and drying herbs, and cutting-edge appliances including a double-door Smeg fridge. It's no longer just the food we're taking away from restaurants, but their whole aesthetic. Here's how...



Left The Gamble Room at the V&A opened as the museum's refreshment room in 1868, decorated in ceramic, glass and enamel. **Below** Gallery at the Savoy, London, features warm marble, cosy banquettes and antique mirrors. **Bottom left** A cosy dining area at the Fat Badger, Notting Hill. **Bottom right** Odine stools by Barker and Stonehouse

Kitchen confidential

The kitchen is what it starts with, according to Anthony Earle, the creative director of Artichoke, the design studio of the seriously moneyed. "Many of our clients have an expectation of their homes working just as seamlessly as a five-star hotel or Michelin-starred restaurant," he says. To cater to demand, Earle has created up to three kitchens for some projects — each with its own purpose — as well as cheffy set-ups featuring teppanyaki plates, spoon-flushing baths, hot cupboards and built-in bains-marie.

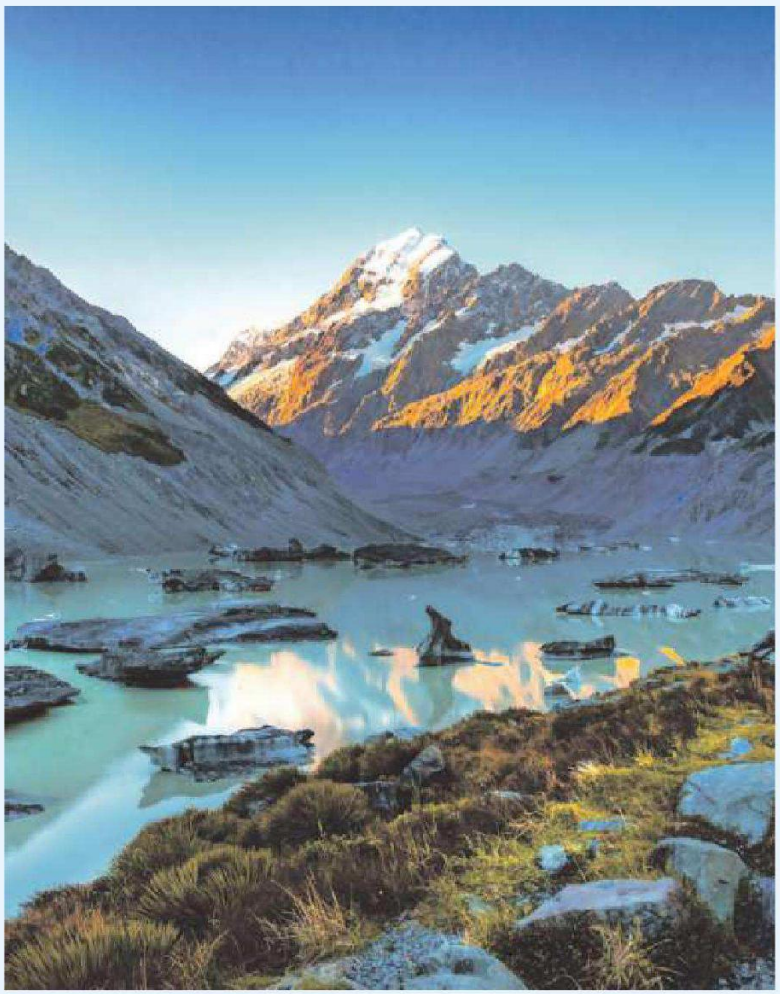
Most recently, Earle drew on inspiration from the interiors of the Harrods food halls, the Savoy and the Gamble Room at the V&A to design a similarly grandiose kitchen in Sussex. It certainly looks the part, with beautifully crafted joinery, oversized double islands, double-height counters, custom architectural tiles and an adjoining dry bar. Downstairs, low-ceilinged cellars have been converted into an at-home tasting room and fine-wine display that take its design cues from European trattorias. The jewel in the crown? Enomatic wine-sampling tech secreted away in a bespoke cabinet that preserves the wine once opened so that it can be drunk in small quantities over time — an idea pinched from Hedonism Wines in Mayfair, apparently.

Hot seat

The best seat in the house? Around your dining table, apparently. "When you go to a great restaurant, you are not just there for the food but the whole experience," says Tom Cox, co-founder of the design practice Studio Ham. "One thing I always come back to in recreating that feeling for clients is booth seating. In a west London home, a client had been to the local restaurants Dorian and the Fat Badger and loved the comfy banquettes there. There's just something so relaxed about them that makes people want to linger. Plus, they're practical in city homes where space is tight, and maximise the space in dining areas better than freestanding chairs."

No budget for a booth? For a fresh take, add a bar stool or three to your kitchen island or breakfast bar to bring the sociable feel of your favourite spot into the space, especially when paired with pendant lights for a flattering glow. Try Odine stools from Barker and Stonehouse or Taino by Oka. ➤

Alexander James, Richard Pickavance, Mia Edmond, Jason Ingram, Jack Hardy, Anna Stathaki



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ABTA No. V4744

Right SHH Architecture & Interiors combined hand-painted chinoiserie wallpaper and Cipollino marble in this bathroom. **Far right** Fromental's hand-painted wallpaper designed in collaboration with Russell Sage Studio for the Goring Hotel, London. **Below** The interior designer Portia Fox worked with the specialist craftspeople behind the statement staircase at Hide, in Mayfair, to create this bespoke version for a client

Wonder walls

If you've ever wondered why the latest and greatest restaurants are so Instagrammable, the winning ingredients are flattering lighting and a gorgeous backdrop — think bespoke wallpaper and custom murals. Fromental is the posh design house of choice for restaurateurs-in-the-know and has created tailored wallcoverings for China Tang on Park Lane, and with Russell Sage Studio for Lilibets in Mayfair and the Goring in Belgravia, among others. The American actress Zooey Deschanel is a fan — the Rainieri style takes pride of place in her powder room designed by Young Huh. And because everyone knows that all the fun in restaurants happens in the loos, a similar space in a recently designed London home by SHH Architecture & Interiors riffs on the iconic bathrooms of the private club Annabel's, with ornate florals and bold patterns.

Stairway to heaven

What's the point in designing interiors worthy of your favourite restaurant if you don't make an entrance? In a recent project by the interior designer Portia Fox, the owner was quite taken by the sculptural staircase at the Mayfair restaurant Hide. "What appealed wasn't just the staircase itself but also the way it defined the experience of the interior and became an integral part of the architecture," Fox explains. "To realise that vision, we worked with the same specialist craftspeople behind the original design to create a bespoke version. It took three years to complete and rises through the centre of the property like a flowing ribbon of timber to connect the different levels."

Luckily, you don't always need a sculptural staircase for a warm welcome. "In restaurants there's often a sense of transition as you move from one space to the other, and you can recreate that at home using full-height curtains or drapery in sheer fabric or luxe velvet to frame an entrance or doorway — an invitation to discover what's beyond," Fox says. "Lighting plays an equally important role. Rather than relying on bright overhead sources, layer in lower-level wall lights or table lamps to create a warmer, more intimate welcome." ■

Ellen Scott has always known she doesn't want children — so she's donating her eggs to those who do

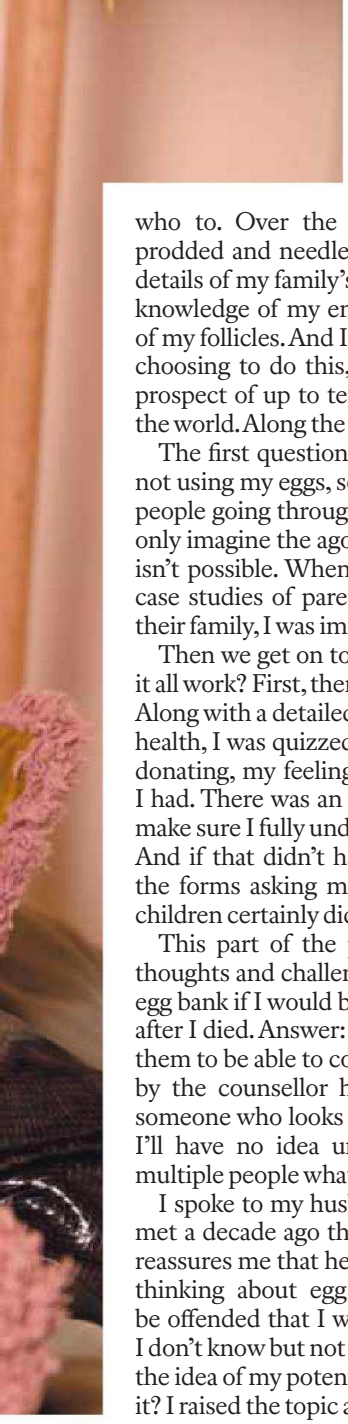
PHOTOGRAPH **AYESHA KAZIM**

'I'M NOT USING MY EGGS, SO SOMEONE ELSE MIGHT AS WELL'

I have never wanted children. I was told that I would eventually change my mind. When I was older. When I met the right person. When I realised that a life without children is empty and meaningless. I waited for the maternal urge to kick in. I'm now 33 and married. The urge never came.

My reasons for not wanting children have remained pretty much the same. Age and experience have given them weight. Kids are expensive. Parenthood is stressful. The mental health impact is risky — I have lived with depression for well over a decade and I know just how low I can go. I can recognise I don't have the mental stability to withstand the immense emotional struggles of raising a child. I've been told I'll regret remaining child-free. Maybe I will. But I would much rather regret not having children than having a child and wishing I hadn't. Motherhood requires dedication to the role. I'm more interested and invested in other things: my work, travel, looking after my cats.

All solid reasons, I think, not to procreate. So why, then, am I injecting myself daily with 300iu of the fertility medication Gonal-F? I'm donating my eggs. I don't know



who to. Over the past few months I've been probed, prodded and needled. I've spent hours filling in extensive details of my family's medical history. I have built a detailed knowledge of my endometrial thickness and the diameter of my follicles. And I have discussed, over and over, why I'm choosing to do this, if I'm sure, and how I feel about the prospect of up to ten of my genetic offspring being out in the world. Along the way I have been asked many questions.

The first question is big: why? My answer is simple: I'm not using my eggs, so someone else might as well. I've seen people going through the pain of fertility struggles and can only imagine the agony of wanting something so badly that isn't possible. When I learnt about egg donation and read case studies of parents who were finally able to complete their family, I was immediately in.

Then we get on to the next question, which is: how does it all work? First, there's all the testing and form-filling to do. Along with a detailed breakdown of my physical and mental health, I was quizzed multiple times on my motivations for donating, my feelings about donating, and any hesitations I had. There was an hour-long session with a counsellor to make sure I fully understood the weight of what I was doing. And if that didn't hammer home that this was a big deal, the forms asking me to write a message to any potential children certainly did the job.

This part of the process brought up a lot of complex thoughts and challenging conversations. I was asked by the egg bank if I would be comfortable with my eggs being kept after I died. Answer: no, but for the child's sake — I wanted them to be able to contact me if they needed to. I was asked by the counsellor how I would feel if in 18 years' time someone who looks like me turned up at my door. Answer: I'll have no idea until it happens! And I was asked by multiple people what my husband thought.

I spoke to my husband early on. He has known since we met a decade ago that I am going to remain child-free and reassures me that he is happy with this. Still, when I started thinking about egg donation, I was worried. Would he be offended that I was willing to give my eggs to someone I don't know but not to him? Would he be too freaked out by the idea of my potential offspring that he'd beg me not to do it? I raised the topic after dinner, sitting on the sofa. I paused the TV so he knew it was serious. And... he was completely fine with it. A few questions and then zero qualms.

Some friends have asked if I'm donating my eggs for financial reasons. Having recently lost my job to redundancy, I understand why. But the money is a bonus, not a motivator. Were I doing egg donation for money, I wouldn't do it in the UK, where actual payment beyond covering expenses is illegal. Here, I can claim a maximum of £985. In America, I'd be looking at thousands of dollars.

And I've asked myself a lot of questions about genetics. Even the seemingly simple request to describe myself physically, in detail, made the process of passing down my genes feel real. The same goes for the part when I was urged to write down any of my quirks that a child could inherit. It's strange to think that a child I don't know might have my nose, that their tongue might swell when they eat pineapple, that they might have a yellow undertone to their skin that makes a natural tan look orange.

And the big one: depression. My depression is a large part of why I don't want kids; not only because I think it limits my ability to be a good parent, but also because I can't bear the thought of watching my child go through it. So the idea that by donating my eggs I could be inflicting depression on someone else is, quite frankly, devastating. It was thinking about this that made me consider backing out of the whole process. I will probably always feel a tiny glimmer of guilt that someone could be suffering because of my dodgy genes.

I don't think my sole purpose in life is reproduction, but doing this feels meaningful

My hope, though, is that by clearly stating my depression on my donor profiles, I can reduce that guilt. If a prospective parent chooses my eggs, they will do so with full knowledge of the risk of depression. I hope this will put them on high alert for any signs that their child is struggling mentally, that they will be prepared from birth to step in and offer necessary support.

The guilt is mitigated by people telling me what a good thing I'm doing. It doesn't feel particularly generous to me — all I go through is some slight discomfort and a sedation — but when I read about how egg donation enables people to become the parents they so desperately want to be, I do feel a bit of a glow. "Donation" is in the name, and the process does have the feelgood factor of giving money to charity. I don't think my sole purpose in life is reproduction, but doing this feels meaningful.

I was curious to know if my reasons for egg donation were common — the surprised expression on clinicians' faces when I gave them makes me think otherwise. The Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority (HFEA) doesn't collect data on donors' reasons for donating, but a representative told me that research suggests "people in the UK donate for altruistic reasons — often after having some experience of fertility problems through family members or friends". The latest data from the HFEA found that in 2020 about one in three egg donors already had their own child, a decrease from previous years, but as women are becoming mothers later in life, it's difficult to know how many of the remaining two thirds are child-free versus child-yes-but-not-yet.

At the time of writing, I have another few days of injections and hormone pills to go. These work in tandem to make my ovaries produce follicles (which may contain eggs) but prevent any eggs being released. When my follicles are the right size, I'll be put under sedation to have the eggs retrieved using a probe with an extending thin needle that sucks them out like a tiny vacuum cleaner. The clinic won't let me cycle home afterwards, so my mum will be collecting me in her car.

If a child were conceived with my eggs, I would tell them that even though we share genetics, their actual, real, proper parents wanted them so desperately they went through immense struggles to bring them into existence. And, thank you. I've gained so much from egg donation; an easy retort next time someone calls me "selfish" for being child-free, and the validation that I don't have to be a parent to help make a family. ■

SARAH JOSSEL

Style's beauty guru is here to share her expert advice

My skin isn't playing ball this summer. Do you change your skincare at this time of year? Any advice for the hot, flustered, flushed and irritable? *Janice, 67*

It's August. The children have been released into the wild for far too long. Your airline has almost certainly lost a bag or three. You've uploaded one too many WFB (that's working from beach) Instagram stories and your favourite shop is still sending emails that this really is your last, last, last chance to shop its summer sale.

Indeed, we are in peak summer mode. And it's unsurprising that your skin is feeling it. My Ask Sarah inbox looks like a support group for skin woes at the moment. The most common complaints are about skin that's oily and congested, dehydrated, puffy or prone to heat-induced irritation

Look, I'll be honest. It's the one time of year I do less. A lot less. When it's 30C — whether at home or on holiday — I have little to no interest in piling on serums, acids, actives and/or moisturisers. It's worth knowing that if you ask a dermatologist, they'll tell you that we should treat our skin like our wardrobes: lighter, airier textures, fewer layers and so on.

So I am keeping it simple with some no-nonsense, gentle gems such as **Bioderma Sensibio AR+ Micellar Gel** (**1** £17). My guess is that you probably know the brand's cult classic **Sensibio H2O Micellar Water** (£14), the instantly recognisable clear bottle with the red lid that every make-up artist swears by for make-up removal. This is its cushiony, gel-based sibling that gently lifts away everything that summer throws at your skin: make-up (including waterproof mascara), sunscreen, pollution and more. It has been a summer saviour for calming redness and keeping my skin hydrated. There are two ways to use it: swipe it on with a cotton pad like a classic make-up remover, or massage it in like a cleanser with your hands to break down make-up. It's the jelly texture that has won me over. Each swipe feels as though I have face-planted on a fresh hotel pillow.

Klaxon! A new brand has landed in the UK. Well, new for us Brits. **Prequel** has been big — no, huge — business in America for a while. Now, the dermatologist-developed brand, founded by Dr Sam Ellis, has arrived at Space NK. The range is built around uncomplicated formulations. Yes please, thank you very much. The biggest talking point is that we are apparently no longer cleansing. We're... wait for it... *gleansing*, with its glycerin-packed **Gleanser** (**2** £20) for dry and dehydrated skins. Oh, and we are pre-gleansing with its **Pre-Gleanse Cleansing Oil** (£22). I'm excited to get stuck in.

Talking of new brands, the tastemaker and creative director Laura Jackson has turned her hand to beauty with **Rocco**, a joyful five-piece collection (so far) of everyday essentials, all priced at under £20. My pick is the **Sunshine Dew Glow Essence** (**3** £18), a golden-hued glow booster that gives skin that elusive candlelit radiance under everyday minimal summer make-up. It's a charming range with plenty of gift appeal for beauty lovers in their twenties and thirties.

Now, what in the summer sun is in **Skinceuticals P-Tiox Wrinkle-Modulating Peptide Serum** (**4** £135) that has caused such a viral frenzy? The official answer is an advanced peptide complex, plus PHA and niacinamide. Sure. Fine. I'll take Skinceuticals' word for it. The bit you need to know is that I used it for a couple of nights in a row and was gifted that glassy, glowy complexion usually reserved for post-facials. Yes, my dog-tired, dull summer skin was transformed. If your face looks like it has survived one too many heatwaves (all of us?), this lightweight, water-based serum gives an instant radiance without feeling sticky.

The brand has also just brought out **P-Tiox Wrinkle and Pore-Modulating Peptide Cream** (**5** £135), which is elegant and cloud-like, and designed to hydrate and refresh. If choosing between the two, I say spend on the serum as it's a treatment step, but both get my seal of approval.

My advice is to keep things simple this summer. Your skin will thank you. I know these hot days can feel bothersome but try to enjoy — you'll blink and be complaining about the central heating wreaking havoc before you know it. ■

Alexandra Cameron, Fernando Gomez/Trunk Archive

Have a beauty question you need answering? Message Sarah at **asksarah@sundaytimes.co.uk** or DM **@sarahjossel**

Get FRESH

WORDS **CHANELLE HO**

From your hair and body to the kitchen floor (yes really), there's a whole world of scent this summer

Here comes the sun

The Mediterranean is back on the fragrance mood board. Think citrus groves, sun-baked woods and salty coastlines. Bellissimo!

THE AMBERY ONE

Jil Sander Vanille, £190 for 100ml EDP (1)

Creamy vanilla is wrapped in cedarwood and rich Spanish labdanum, making it soft and sexy. Best worn on sun-warmed skin, this is perfect for summer days and balmy nights.

THE GOURMAND ONE

Estée Lauder Glimmer, £125 for 100ml EDP, from August 12 (2)

If golden hour was a scent this would be it. Juicy raspberry and vanilla bean melt into patchouli, amber and sandalwood for a sensual fragrance that feels made for sunsets.

THE FLORAL ONE

Chloé Atelier des Fleurs Plage du Figuier, £115 for 50ml EDP (3)

Delightfully figgy and floral but in the most delicate way, this scent uses the flower and pulp of figs for creamy fresh sweetness, with a hit of airy orange blossom.

THE FRESH ONE

Jo Malone London Sea Salt & Bergamot Cologne, £58 for 30ml (4)

This is summer by the sea in a bottle. Fresh salty sea air and weathered driftwood meet bright bergamot — like citrus trees on sunny shores.

Make it social

First came book clubs, then running clubs, and now... perfume clubs? From the Bristol Scent Club to the Smell Club run by Soliflore perfume shop in Brighton, fragrance fanatics are meeting up to swap samples and dissect perfume notes. Olga Petrouchenko is the host of Perfume Lovers London, which has seen membership grow to more than 1,000 people, and organises guided fragrance walks, perfume show'n'tells and scented dinners. For something more immersive, head to Commune in Bruton, Somerset, for its monthly Slow Scent workshops where you can find out what a heart note actually is and blend your own custom fragrance. Hosting a dinner party? Olfactive O's founder and creative director, Olivia da Costa, will bring her Sniff & Sip masterclass to you for a night of fragrance discovery paired with wines and spirits. Cheers to that!

Stack your scents

Still just spraying your perfume? These days fragrance comes in all sorts of textures, made to layer for longevity. "A wardrobe of scent is best — you can mix whatever you like," says David Seth Moltz, the co-founder and perfumer of the cult favourite DS & Durga. "Whether a perfumed lotion or solid stick, it can act as a primer to customise your fragrance on top." Here's the latest in layering.

THE GEL

Dolce & Gabbana Dolce EDP Perfume Gel, £48 for 30ml (5)

This pocket-sized gel melts into skin with a few swipes from its cooling metal applicator. Smush on underneath your usual perfume to change how your scent blooms through the day. Also infused with hydrating hyaluronic acid, this is a bright blend of bergamot, orange blossom and mimosa.

THE STICK

Sol de Janeiro Jelly Perfume Balms, £25 each (6)

According to TikTok Shop sales of perfume sticks increased 186 per cent from May to June. Leading the charge? These twist-up jelly sticks glide on clean, leaving no trace of oiliness behind. There are three scents to choose from, including the brand's signature pistachio and caramel Cheirosa 62. Swipe on throughout the day for a guilt-free sugar high.

THE BODY CREAM

Hermès Musc Padilla Perfumed Body Cream, £128 (7)

If your limbs are looking cracked and scaly from too much sun exposure, slather on this nonsticky cream packed with soothing aloe vera and shea butter. As for the scent by the perfumer Christine Nagel, it's a soft, powdery blend of iris and musk that's not too shouty.

THE DEODORANT

Parudeesa Solid Deodorant, from £14 (8)

Made with antibacterial silver and probiotics, the fragrances of these deodorant body bars have been crafted with master perfumers from Grasse — the noses behind some of Byredo and Kilian's most loved scents. For fresh pits, go for Ap, which has notes of salt, pine and amber. If you prefer something with a little zing, Vata has sparkling bergamot, jasmine and cedarwood.

Spruce up your space

Ocean breeze in the bathroom, citrus in the kitchen and clean cotton for laundry? How predictable. Home fragrancing has moved into the utility room. From laundry detergents to cleaning sprays, domestic chores are getting an upgrade.

FOR YOUR COUNTERTOP

Daylesford Natural Multi-Surface Cleaner, £10 (9)

The cult Cotswolds farm shop now does homecare. For those looking for eco-friendly cleaning products, this 100 per cent biodegradable and 99 per cent natural origin surface cleaner cuts through grease and dirt, leaving behind a delicious trail of chamomile, neroli and cedarwood.

FOR YOUR LAUNDRY

The Lab Co Laundry Detergent Strips in Welcoming, £12 for 64 loads (10)

Who said fragrance layering was limited to perfumes? These dissolvable strips, scented with heady oud, rose and bergamot, go straight in the drum and leave a lingering scent on clothes for days.

FOR YOUR FLOORS

Purdy & Figg Floor Clean, from £20 (11)

This doesn't smell like something you'd expect when you're mopping, which is entirely the point. There are three scents to choose from. Don't be put off by the largely plant-based formula, it still makes floors sparkly and gets rid of stubborn marks.

Bottles with benefits

Try these clever mists that scent your hair through every swish and flick, with added extras from SPF to split ends prevention.

FOR SUN PROTECTION

Darling Milky Hair Screen, £27 (12)

This really is the do-it-all hair mist for summer. UV and heat protection? Tick. Detangles and adds shine? Tick. Smells like balmy sun-soaked holidays? Tick, tick, tick! Just spritz, comb through and go.

FOR LESS FRIZZ

Merwave Anti-Frizz Hair Perfume, £17 (13)

Summer humidity, meet your match. A spray of this stuff instantly tames frizz and flyaways thanks to softening aloe leaf juice and smoothing castor oil, plus it smells like a beach in a bottle with notes of juicy mango, white florals, vanilla, caramel and cocoa.

FOR MORE SHINE

Gisou Honey Infused Hair Perfume Vanille Glaze Mini, £20 (14)

Hair looking a bit dry and lacklustre? Refresh between washes with this shine-enhancing hair perfume that perks up locks, while Mirsalehi honey — the brand's hero ingredient sourced from the founder's bee garden — adds a hit of hydration. As for the scent? It's smells like the height of summer with vanilla and musk. ■

INDIA KNIGHT

This wash-off bronzing serum gives sunkissed, glowy skin

Alexandra Cameron

I've had my make-up done professionally a few times recently. I always ask for particular attention to be paid to my skin — you can have the best make-up in the world, but if your skin doesn't look optimal the whole effect is slightly wasted. No fewer than three of the make-up artists in question used this week's product, which I am now devoted to.

I should preface all this by saying that **By Terry** is one of my very favourite brands when it comes to summer make-up, and I can't mention it without also mentioning Tea to Tan Face & Body (£59), the greatest wash-off colour known to man (works on everyone, looks completely natural, doesn't smell weird, gives perfect colour on the face and/or body). I also want to mention the brand's Brightening CC Palette Sunny Flash (£56), which I was playing about with in Space NK and liked so much that I bought it. This is four light-reflecting powders that do everything — you can use them as powder, bronzer, contour and blush; I also use the darkest shade as eyeshadow.

But this week's product is called **Tea to Tan Golden Glow** (£42). I should warn you that it looks quite alarming in the bottle, so ignore that because it looks amazing on the face. It's an "aqua-bronzer illuminating serum", which translated means it's a serum that you put on your face either by itself (or by itself with concealer), or under whatever light base you're wearing that day — although you could also wear it on top, I suppose. Or mix it into anything. It is super-light, watery in texture and completely unsticky. The ingredients are wholesome.

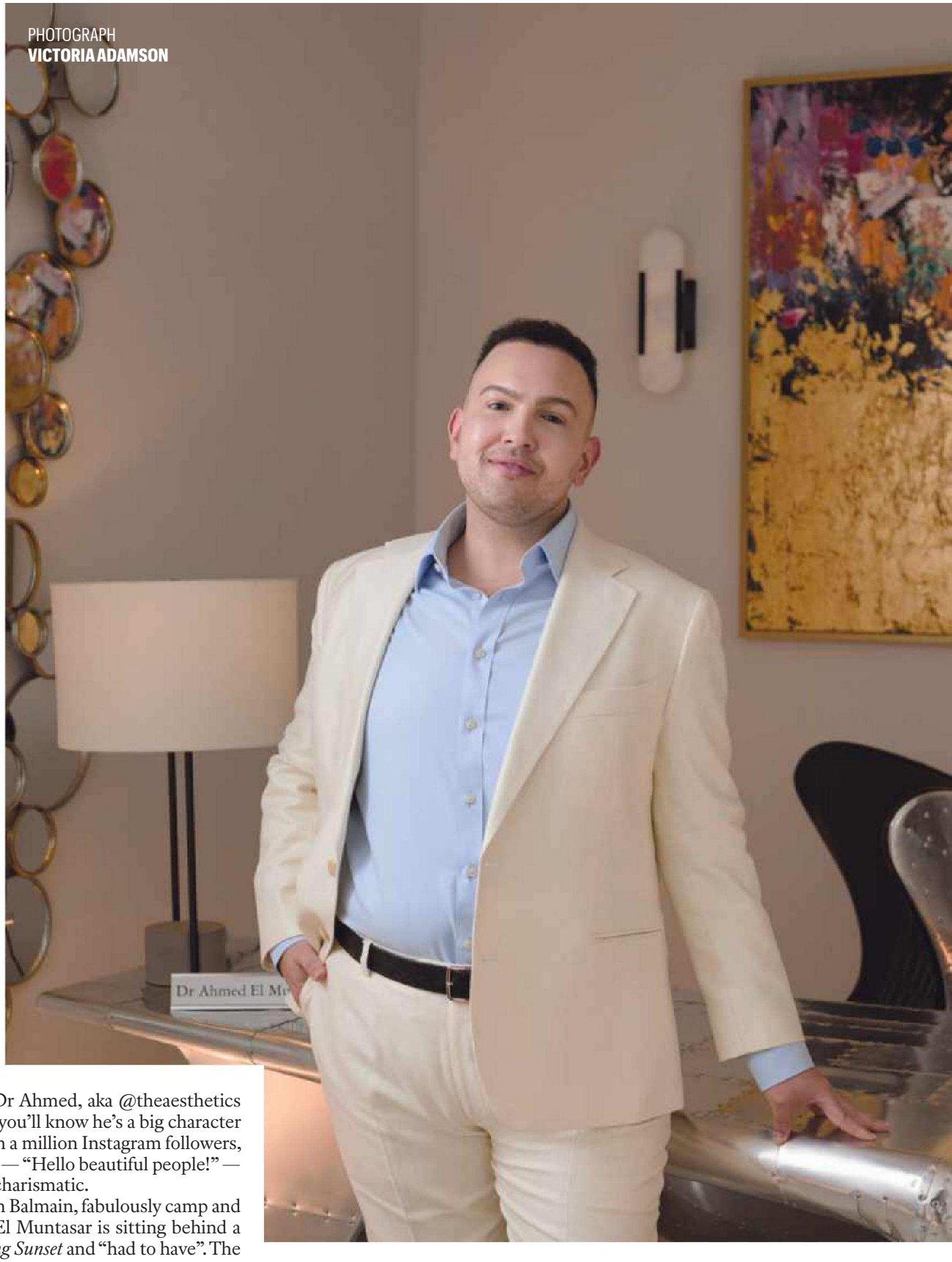
What it does is make you look like you have amazing sunkissed skin that glows with good health. You look like you're on holiday at golden hour, except all day. Maybe you're thinking, "Oh yes, I know those sorts of products, loads of people do them," which is what I thought too until the stuff was actually on my face. I don't think anybody does this product like this.

The colour and the effect are so impeccably judged: both are elegant. Not a word I use often in the context of cosmetics

Like the OG fake-bronzing Tea to Tan, it's the colour and the effect that are so impeccably judged: both are elegant. Not a word I use often in the context of cosmetics, but it's the mot juste here. With any kind of bronzy, summery make-up in a bottle there is always the risk that the product will be too much. You don't want to be an improbable colour, you don't want anything that has orange in it, you want to glow in a plausible way but not look as if you've dunked your face in a bucket of sparkles — and above all, you want the effect to be flattering without anyone going, "I wonder what that product is?" The product here is not detectable: it just looks like naturally fantastic, glowing, discreetly tanned skin. (If you want more tan, go over everything with a squirt of Tea to Tan Face & Body afterwards.)

INDIA LOVES Isle of Wight Tomatoes (the best fresh tomatoes by post) does the most sublime condiment known to man. Its Oak Smoked Tomato Balsamic is so delicious that you could eat it by the teaspoon. Or tablespoon, tbh. Amazing on sliced tomatoes with a bit of salt, also in salad dressings. It is dazzlingly good — sweet but not too sweet, smoky but not too smoky, crazily moreish. Like essence of summer. *£10, iowtomatoes.co.uk*

PHOTOGRAPH
VICTORIA ADAMSON



As a bullied gay teen, Ahmed El Muntasar left Libya at 16 to study medicine in Scotland. Now he's a sought-after cosmetic doctor with over a million followers. ***Decca Aitkenhead*** books in for a treatment

DR BEAUTIFUL

If you have ever seen Dr Ahmed, aka @theaesthetics doctor, on social media, you'll know he's a big character online. He has more than a million Instagram followers, and a signature greeting — "Hello beautiful people!" — but IRL he's even more charismatic.

Dressed head-to-toe in Balmain, fabulously camp and very funny, Dr Ahmed El Muntasar is sitting behind a desk he spotted on *Selling Sunset* and "had to have". The 34-year-old looks and sounds more like a reality star than a highly qualified doctor, but even more impressive than his pizzazz is his story of how a teen from Tripoli became the UK's biggest cosmetic doctor on social media.

El Muntasar "always felt like I didn't belong. I was this spotty, chunky, short, light-skinned kid who just

didn't fit in." To be gay in Libya in the 1990s was unthinkable, so he buried himself in school books and kept quiet. But when he was 15, three much older students — one armed with a knife — cornered him in his school toilet. Shouting "Fag!", they locked the door, pinned him on the floor, ripped off his shirt and stubbed cigarettes out on his chest. He unbuttons his shirt to show me thick, red scarring.

"But you know? That altercation was the best thing that's ever happened to me. Honestly, that set such a fire under my ass. It was the fuel I needed to leave." Within 12 months he was the University of St Andrews' youngest ever medical student.

El Muntasar was so young, in fact, that the police showed up at his dorm, worried he might be a victim of child trafficking. "I stuck out like a sore thumb. And this is horrible to say out loud, but I really looked fresh off the boat. I didn't know how to communicate with this upper echelon of society at St Andrews, where people had gone to Harrow and Eton. So I kept my head down."

By the time he graduated in 2013 with a degree in biomedical science, Libya had descended into civil war, so he went to medical school in Manchester, followed by a two-year hospital residency in Blackburn.

"I'm very much unfazed by anything as a doctor," El Muntasar says with a twinkly smile, "because I've probably seen it in Blackburn. I remember seeing someone's arm chopped with a samurai sword, a person with two vaginas, gunshot wounds. It was a very interesting place."

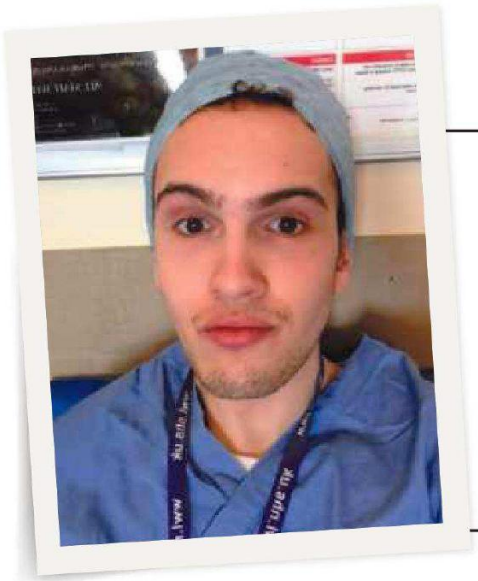
At 26 he moved to a studio flat in Fulham to do a masters at University College London, during which he booked himself in to see a "superstar of the cosmetic industry" for an under-eye tweakment. "I loved the results, but her clinic was more beauty than medical. I remember thinking, I can do such a better job than her. Let's put medicine back into aesthetic medicine."

He had £6,000 to his name, and "I thought I was so rich! But a little bit of delulu can be powerful." He invested almost all of it in an aesthetics course: "The best £5,500 I ever spent." Once qualified, he rented a basement in Mayfair by the hour — "I felt like a medical ho" — and began offering treatments and posting on social media.

"People were bullying me senseless, because in 2018 to be a doctor posting on social media was shameful. But I wanted to demystify treatments." Within nine months he had 10,000 followers. The more flamboyant his posts, the faster his numbers grew.

"In Libya, my personality was haram. Then in medical school I was too loud, too boisterous. I felt I had to compress my personality because they wanted us to be homogeneous." But on social media his personality became his superpower. "People were coming not just to get a great treatment but also to meet me."

In 2019 El Muntasar moved back to Manchester to qualify as a GP, during which he opened private cosmetic clinics in Leeds and Cheshire, nipping back to London each week to see clients in his Mayfair basement. "I was the doctor, the social media manager, the business manager. I even pretended to be my own PA, replying to emails as 'Phoebe'." His online following grew to 50,000 — and then the pandemic struck. "Oh crap," he thought. "My aesthetic career is over. But it was actually the biggest stepping stone I had."



'In 2018 to be a doctor posting on social media was shameful. But I wanted to demystify treatments'

Opposite Dr Ahmed El Muntasar in his Mayfair clinic. **Above** El Muntasar while working in oncology plastic surgery at the Christie in Manchester in 2014

Deployed to an NHS hospital, surrounded by death, El Muntasar began posting on social media about working on the wards. *Good Morning Britain* noticed and invited him on to talk to Piers Morgan. Soon everyone from the BBC to Forbes magazine was interviewing him about the pandemic. By the time lockdown ended he had 800,000 Instagram followers and a 12-month waiting list at all three clinics. "So what I thought was the end of my aesthetic career was the cornerstone of the rest of my life."

Last year he opened his new flagship clinic in Mayfair, two glossy, white floors, staffed by a team of 12. Clients visit from all over the world, and when he gave me a liquid nose job, I could see why. Nonsurgical rhinoplasty is one of his specialisms, involving injecting filler into the nose, which sounded counterintuitive to me. I've always had a big nose, how could adding filler help? Apparently, my septum has spread as I've aged, which accounted for the new dip above its tip and explained why it was drooping towards my upper lip. Artful injections of filler lifted the tip, appearing to shorten the nose, and smoothed the conks in the bridge. It was nothing less than miraculous.

I'd happily put my face in his hands for the rest of my life — and wouldn't be the only one. "At the beginning of my career people would come in and tell me what they wanted done. Now they come in and say, 'My face is a dropping a little bit, what do you think I should have?'" He laughs. "If I get just a pound for every time a woman puts her hands at her temples and pulls up, I'm going to be opening a new clinic."

The collagen-stimulating injectable Juläine is the new treatment he's most excited about. "A lot of the traditional collagen stimulants are great for the heavy-lifting areas, but because Juläine has a smaller molecular structure you can use it in delicate areas like under the eyes, the smile lines, décolletage, hands, knees, everywhere."

He still works part-time as an NHS GP, but now drives a Porsche Macan and owns a five-bedroom house in Balham. "For the longest time I wanted to prove to myself that I could buy a house in London — but actually," and he starts to laugh again, "it's a bit too big." He lives with his partner, a town planner, and they've decided to downsize and move to an apartment in Chelsea.

Does he do his partner's treatments? El Muntasar looks scandalised. "Of course! Imagine if he went somewhere else. He'd be sleeping on the sofa." ■

theaestheticsdoctor.com

UNZIPPED!
Jorja Smith

The singer on Miu Miu bags, M&S undies and her love of a festival T-shirt

What are you wearing to death this summer?
Is sporty chic a thing? I think that sums it up. Capris from Alo, Adanola or Nike with a Weekday or Uniqlo vest top, or a big vintage T-shirt and a cute bra with a designer handbag and sunglasses. I'm trying to make more of an effort with my underwear. Usually it's just black or nude, but today I'm wearing a fluorescent bra from Marks & Spencer. I love a big, baggy tracksuit from Sharkkini too.

What was the last thing you bought?
A Miu Miu tan leather bowling bag [*above*]. It was my birthday a few weeks ago and I treated myself. I'd had my eye on it for a while so I went for it. I'm obsessed with it and am going to use it every day.

Where did you shop growing up?
New Look, River Island and charity shops. There is a place in the West Midlands called Newlife, which is basically a charity shop but all the stuff is new. So it might be something that is discontinued or has a button missing.

What are your fashion regrets?
I used to wear blazers when I was about 13 or 14 with skinny jeans. I guess it was my indie sleaze phase. It wasn't a good look for me! Also, do you remember those tops with the high collar and the really big gap under the arms? Why was that such a trend? I buttoned them right up to the top. That's definitely a regret from my teen years.

Who else has great style?
I love Paloma Elsesser. Everything she wears is so sexy and effortless.

Complete this sentence: I will never forget what I was wearing when...
I performed in front of Quincy Jones on his birthday, at Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland in 2018 [*below*]. It wasn't planned. Ezra Collective were playing and asked if I wanted to jump up and sing a song. I had an Orseund Iris dress in my bag so I wore that with some green leopard shoes. I just remember it was so last minute and I couldn't believe I was performing in front of Quincy Jones — what the hell? But it worked.

What do you have too many of but never seem to throw away?
Merchandise tops. I have an entire drawerful! My own [*right*], other peoples, every festival I've been to, I will have a T-shirt from there. I wear or sleep in one for a few weeks and then never wear it again, but I can't throw any of them away, I love them.

What's on your designer wish list?
Chanel ballet flats [*above*]. Can I have them in every colour? I would also love to be slipped into all Alaïa's dresses. I'm into fishtail skirts at the moment too — Jean Paul Gaultier has a gorgeous one. I just bought some really cute black Isabel Marant shorts that look a bit combaty.

What's the most sentimental item in your wardrobe?
Jewellery that my mum has made. She's Jolene Smith jewellery and I've got lots of her pieces that are meaningful because I'll keep them for ever. For my 20th or 21st birthday she made me a beautiful gold necklace with a small black diamond on it, and I love it so much and wear it all the time. ■

Jorja Smith's new album, What Are the Odds, is released on August 21 on Famm

As told to Scarlett Russell. Photographs: Ivor Lawson-Adamah, Alamy

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